REMIXING RESILIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL BLACK MALES IN AN URBAN MIDWESTERN CITY

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

One of the most dynamically discussed topics in urban education today is the academic performance and success of African American males. While the accessibility to a high-quality education impacts a sizeable portion of students, the literature reinforces the fact that Black males remain one of the most socially and academically marginalized student groups in U.S. schools. The necessity to advance the success of young Black men entering the realm of higher education is crucial. This research study was conducted as case study of seven academically successful African American males in an urban midwestern city. A qualitative research framework was employed to answer an overarching question: *How can the voices of college educated Black males inform efforts to promote success among Black males educated in urban environments?* and five guiding research questions: (1) How did Black males leverage the various resources within their social networks to develop an achievement persona and persist academically? (2) How did Black males negotiate social networks within Black communities? (3) How did Black males benefit from social networks within Black communities? And (4) How did out of class learning experiences contribute to the academic success of Black males in college?

The results of the present study expand the definition of resilience. The voices of the Black males allow researchers to continue to reframe and rewrite the narrative regarding Black male success. The findings suggest that we remix resilience by viewing it as an asset-based process that speaks to the success of Black males. Four major themes emerged as a result of this study: contested prolificacy, community proactivity, familial

perseverance and academic persistence. These themes join to create the Ecology of Hope Model, which offers an avenue to consider the relationship between African American males and their physical environment (society).

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my dear mother, Dr. Daa'iyah Farooq. I am grateful to Almighty God, Allah, for blessing our family with such a morally-upright, wise and resilient mother. You have been my coach through this entire process and the ultimate example of success. Through it all, you reassured me that there was a favorable end in sight. I am honored to follow in your footsteps. Paradise lies at the foot of the mother. Through your life example, I fully understand why. Mama, I did it! Alhamdullilah.

To my father, Imam Eugene Farooq, thank you for setting an example of righteousness and steadfastness. You have modeled what commitment looks like in different aspects of your life. Perhaps, unknowingly, you transferred the notion of commitment to your children. Though a silent force, your actions speak volumes. Thank you, daddy.

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In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful. Man can have nothing but what he strives for. The fruit of his striving will soon come in sight. Then will he be rewarded with a reward complete. That to thy Lord is the final goal.

Holy Quran 53:39 - 42

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most dynamically discussed topics in urban education today is the academic performance and success of African American males. While the accessibility to a high-quality education impacts a sizeable portion of students, the literature reinforces the fact that Black males remain one of the most socially and academically marginalized student groups in U.S. schools (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2013; Lewis & Erskine, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Polite & Davis, 1999). Currently, there exists an underrepresentation of Black males in higher education. The necessity to advance the success of young Black men entering the realm of higher education is crucial. Factors affecting Black male achievement are abundant and impact the overall educational process and college matriculation efforts of young Black men.

Media coverage of African American males depicts them as a violent, pathological and irresponsible lot, predestined to be dropouts and deadbeats. The challenges facing African American males are undeniable and daunting, yet there exist countless untold stories of persistence and perseverance that are too often drowned out by popular narratives of mass deviance. The present work provides a space to explore the counternarratives and matched voices of college educated African American males who graduated from an underserved urban high school in a large midwestern urban city. But first, the myriad of challenges facing African American males in U.S. society and in education, particularly, will be detailed. The related challenges are outlined, beginning

with educational statistics and transcending through societal and academic implications for academic success.

Current Narrative

The national narrative regarding the education of African American males is focused around a plethora of dismal statistics. The academic achievement of African American males in preK-12 schools has been the subject of a growing number of scholarly works over the past two and a half decades (Brown & Davis, 2000; Davis, 2003; Franklin, 1991; Gibbs, 1988; Hopkins, 1997; Madhubuti, 1990; Noguera, 1996; Polite, 1994; Polite & Davis, 1999; Price, 2000). There are 2.3 million young Black men, ages 18-24, living in the United States (Educational Testing Service, 2014). While Black males make up 7% of the U.S. student population, it should be equally noted that they are the least likely to secure a regular diploma four years after beginning high school (Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). At the national level, the 2012-13 school year estimates indicate a graduation rate of 59% for Black males, 65% for Latino males and 80% for White males (Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males, 2015). Consequently, and on a national scale, 53% of African-American males have either dropped-out, been expelled or have exceeded the age requirement for P-12 school enrollment. Moreover, statistics show that only 35.2% of Black men who began college as first-time freshmen in 2006 graduated in 2012 (United States Department of Education, 2014).

There are several factors that lead to the aforementioned dropout rates. From a subject matter standpoint, perhaps no other subject area is as critical to overall academic

success as reading and literacy (Lesnick, George, Smithgall, & Gwynne, 2010). Although reading scores of Black males in grades 4 and 8 have increased over the past decade, they still trail behind those of White, Latino, and Asian males, and a large majority fall short of grade-level proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2012). In many large urban districts across the country, Black males *without disabilities* had lower reading scores in grades 4, 8, and 12, and lower grade-level proficiency, than White males *with disabilities* (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2012). In many large urban districts across the country, the reading achievement scores for 8th grade Black males are consistent with the reading scores for 4th grade Asian American and White males (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Academic research spanning decades, reveal the disproportionately low graduation statistics of Black males in higher education (Howard, 2014). Harper (2012) explains that the basis for concern is not a matter of matriculation, but rather an amalgamation of structural barriers to graduation. Essentially, Black males are successfully enrolling in and attending institutions of higher education. However, they are constantly negotiating a combination of obstacles, within the systemic structure of the educational system, that potentially stand in the way of their academic progress. Black men undeniably persist to degree completion at disproportionately lower rates than their White, other minority, or female counterparts (Harper, 2012; Palmer, 2010).

Educational barriers. The research provides detailed accounts of the limitations and academic failure of African American males. Anyone studying the success of African American males should seemingly recognize some apparent barriers that impede their

progress. There are researchers that argue that African American males are failing due to a variety of reasons. Some of the most notable reasons include lack of teacher preparation, engagement, deficit thinking toward African American boys (Harper, 2005; Hilliard, 1991; Lewis & Erskine, 2008; Weiner, 2000, 2003), lack of cultural relevance in the classroom, the misunderstanding of identity (Banks, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Ogbu, 1991), low levels of parental involvement (Wallis, 1995), and lastly, researchers state that African American males have been set up for failure from the beginning and attempts to address the issue have failed tragically or have been initiated without proper follow through (Bell, 1996, 2004; Days, 2001; Green, 2004; Guinier, 2004; Harper, 2008). The barriers pertinent to this study are deficit-based framework, institutional inopportunity, educational achievement gap and the opportunity gap.

Deficit-based framework. The marginalization of students of color stems from the conscious thoughts of educational stakeholders. These ill-informed thoughts directly affect the Black male. Deficit thinking has been defined by Skrla and Scheurich (2001) and Valencia (1997) as the governing epistemology that informs the quality of education and educational leadership for many economically, linguistically, and culturally diverse children in America. Black male students have been portrayed as incapable, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at-risk to fail at best (Fries-Britt, 1997, Harper, 2009; Jenkins, 2006).

Historically, researchers have sought to figure out the root cause(s) of low achievement as demonstrated by Black males. Majoritarian narratives support a deficit-based framework to understanding Black male academic achievement. The perpetuation of these negatively fueled stereotypes serves to impact the educational success and

motivation of Black males. Reframing the educational success of Black males requires a developed awareness of the complex societal and educational underpinnings amassed against them. It also requires authentic insight into what it takes for these young men to navigate through periods of inopportunity. While the literature is abundant concerning the factors that contribute to or predict academic failure among Black males (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar, 2003), there is a dire need to continually redress this issue and provide frameworks of potential and possibility to inform the next generation of research.

Institutional inopportunity. As the research surrounding the Black male and the related educational experiences are explored, there is justifiable cause to address the institutional inopportunity that directly support these dismal figures. One of the consequences of institutional inopportunity for African American males is the risk of being funneled into what has been called the "School to Prison Pipeline" (Muwakkil, 2006). The School to Prison Pipelines refers to the trend in the United States school system of criminalizing actions of *at risk* students in schools (typically students of color) with zero-tolerance policies and school arrests, ultimately denying these students of color access to education (Fenning & Rose, 2007). African American youth constitute 45% of juvenile arrests, although they make up only 16% of the overall youth population (NAACP, 2006). African American males account for over 35% of the prison population, yet they comprise only 6% of the population (NAACP, 2006). Their criminalization begins early in school. K-12 Black students are twice as likely as their White peers to be suspended from school and three times as likely to be expelled (NAACP, 2006). First time offender Black students are far more likely than first time offender White students to be

suspended, even given the same offense (Losen, 2011). African American males who drop out of school are incarcerated eight times more than their college educated counterparts, and 1 in 25 educated African American men were incarcerated as compared to 1 in 3 for African American dropouts (Western, 2007).

James and Lewis (2014) identify four entry points into the School to Prison Pipeline as being zero tolerance policies, disproportionate referral of African American males into the criminal justice system, research based district level suspensions, and the high rates of dropouts among African American males. The promotion of these entry points aid and abet the institutional inopportunity of the African American male.

Achievement gap. The achievement gap, one of the most widely discussed education related topics in the United States, refers to the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The National Governors' Association describes the achievement gap as a matter of race and class; and as one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face (National Governors' Association, 2005). Researchers have suggested various root causes of the achievement gap. Scholars in the 1960's identified cultural deficit theories to suggest that children of color were victims of pathological lifestyles that hindered their ability to benefit from schooling (Hess & Shipman, 1965; Bereiter & Engleman, 1966; Deutsch, 1963).

Multiculturalists, such as James Banks (2004) and Geneva Gay (2004), have focused on the nature of the curriculum and the school as sources of the gap. Practitioners like Christine Sleeter (2001) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) have focused on the

pedagogical practices of teachers as contributing to either the widening or narrowing of the gap. The problems, however, have not been ignored, but they haven't been addressed in a sensible, meaningful way; they have been misdiagnosed and mishandled (Welner & Carter, 2013). While disparities in achievement have weighed heavily in policy discussions, over time, meager consideration has been given to opportunistic incongruences in education. Current discussions of the achievement gap highlight and emphasize significant differences in school results between groups based on measured outcomes such as test scores and graduation rates (Welner & Carter, 2013).

Opportunity gap. A strong argument can be made that America's imbalanced opportunity structure has sadly created substantial differences in the educational journey for children of color. The term, "opportunity gap", shifts our attention from outcomes to inputs; to the deficiencies in the foundational components of societies, schools, and communities that produce significant differences in educational; and ultimately socioeconomic outcomes (Welner & Carter, 2013). Essentially, achievement gaps highlight symptoms, while an imbalanced opportunity structure focuses on root causes. Learning and life chances depend on key out of school factors such as health, housing, nutrition, safety, and enriching experiences, in addition to opportunities provided through formal elementary and secondary school preparation (Rothstein, 2013). School quality is understandably a significant part of the equation. However, the lived learning experiences and the necessary resources, outside of the classroom, must improve for America's disadvantaged children, if we realistically expect to close the "achievement gap".

Empowering Spaces

Not often do we hear of success stories as it relates to academic achievement for students of color. When we do hear of such achievement, it is trumpeted as a miracle, as an exception to the rule, as the work that can only be done by teachers who have special charisma, as outliers that have to be regarded as statistical errors or mere accidents (Hilliard, 1995). In order for students of color to experience meaningful progress, they must be placed in situations that empower their overall being. Making empowering spaces accessible to students of color necessitates the employment of an anti-deficit framework, increasing out of class engagement and benefitting from social capital (Harper, 2012, 2005; Gasman and Palmer, 2008). Similar to previous research conducted by Harper (2015), Black men take pride in redefining the narrative about themselves, as well as being aware of the deficit perspectives about Black men, they seek to always directly challenge the narrative by being successful (Goings, 2016).

Anti-Deficit Framework. In response to this deficit-informed approach to understanding Black male success, a portion of this study will employ an anti-deficit framework to explain how Black males defeat the odds and achieve academic success. Targeting individual students, their families and communities, blaming them for low academic performance is the hallmark for the deficit model. Recent scholarship has departed from a deficit-informed orientation by focusing on successful Black male achievers at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), demonstrating that successful Black collegians serve as agents, displaying strong self-efficacy and engagement (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

Harper (2012) introduced an anti-deficit framework that researchers, educators, and administrators can use to better understand Black male student success in college. Harper's framework inverts questions that are commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition (Harper, Berhanu, Davis, & McGuire, 2014). Essentially, his framework manages research topics through the employment of anti-deficit questioning techniques. Harper's anti-deficit framework provides researchers with a guide to develop research questions and accounts of Black males that emphasize their successes rather than their failures. It includes plausible questions for educators and researchers to explore to better understand Black male success.

Out of class engagement. Harper (2005) conducted a study examining the effects of active out of class engagement on the experiences of thirty-two African American male student leaders at six large PWIs in the Midwest. He studied a group of African American men who exceeded the expectations of academic achievement and exemplify an enthusiastic commitment to learning, active engagement, citizenship, and the acquisition of practical competencies (Harper, 2005). His research suggests that active engagement, both inside and outside of the classroom, affords African American males the opportunity to establish meaningful relationships with faculty and key campus administrators. Ultimately, their out of class investments enhanced their overall collegiate experiences. The most successful are typically those who use multiple resources, maximize both in- and out of class learning experiences and can work productively, performing a wide range of tasks. Richard Light (2001) describes the powerful ways that out of class experiences

affect undergraduate student learning and insists that those who enjoy the most profound and enduring outcomes are actively engaged inside and outside of the classroom.

Social capital. Stanton-Salazar (1997) defined social capital as relationships with institutional agents and the networks that afford access to resources and information for social progression and the accomplishment of goals. Gasman and Palmer (2008) conducted a qualitative study at a public doctoral research intensive HBCU in a mid-Atlantic state to assess the role of social capital in promoting academic success for African American men. The researchers sought to understand the social experiences of African American men in a specific context. Through a series of face-to-face, in depth interviews, they engaged participants about their academic and social experiences at the university. The data from this study contribute to the literature by examining manifestations of social capital and their impact on success for academically unprepared African American men attending an HBCU (Gasman & Palmer, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

On a national level, culturally responsive instructional leaders must give serious consideration to how they are assisting African American students' interests in school and are helping shape their college aspirations. Black male students are often comparatively less prepared than are others for the rigors of college-level academic work (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006; Loury, 2004; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Black male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). The statistics are continual and can appear dismal. However, Black males still persist in

navigating their way to and through higher education, despite all that is stacked against them – low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation, to name a few (Harper, 2012).

Nationally, culturally responsive instructional leaders should be focused on the reasons students are not learning rather than standardized measurements provided by national testing centers. Moreover, culturally responsive instructional leaders should pay attention to the attitude gap (the gap between students who believe in themselves and those who do not), the relationship gap (students who have a solid relationship with educators versus those who do not), the opportunity gap (students who have access to a great public school versus those who do not), and the relevance gap (lessons that students can apply to their daily lives versus lessons that are abstract and intangible) (National Education Association, 2011).

According to The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (2012), the state represented in the current study is ranked in the bottom quartile of Black male graduation rates. The statistics show a 47% graduation rate for Black males (Schott 50 State Report, p. 15). On average, states with low graduate rates for Black male students tend to have concentrations of those students in under-resourced districts where both Black and White male students perform poorly (Schott 50 State Report, p. 13). While a state level analysis provides the culturally responsive instructional leader with a snapshot of where their respective state stands compared to other U.S. states, a district level analysis will yield a more focused, intentional view at institutional practices that contribute to the

results. The Midwestern U.S. city where the proposed data set was conducted, has an approximated enrollment of 82,060 Black males with a 41% graduate rate for this group (Schott 50 State Report, 2012).

Some relatable challenges, as experienced by Black males, are worth considering if the culturally responsive instructional leader seeks to address the needs of the African American male. State and district level measures of handling discipline often times equate to students being pushed out of the classroom. This current approach to disciplining students in the U.S. runs counter to keeping them engaged and educating them (Schott 50 State Report, 2012). These patterns often reflect a lack of knowledge about how to work effectively with these groups of students and a lack of systems for solving real problems within schools (p. 4). In order to address this institutional issue, culturally responsive instructional leaders must lean on solution measures.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this research is to present the counter-narratives of Black males who successfully negotiated deficit-based societal challenges and institutional inopportunity to achieve academic success. Their voices of will inform efforts to promote success among Black males educated in urban environments. Likewise, this study will highlight themes of community transference, collective wisdom and the shared language of academic success experienced by Black males as byproducts of the urban education system in America (Hargrett, 2014).

This study uses key concepts related to the employed theories to determine the following:

- how the counter narratives of successful Black males suppress the majoritarian view of Black male academic achievement
- how counterstorytelling is used as a methodological tool to reconceptualize research with Black males
- how Black males navigated periods of institutional inopportunity – opportunity in their own indigenous way, thereby shaping their academic success
- how the shared language of the community serves as an upholding force and strength mechanism for Black males navigating institutional inopportunity
- how societal and educational forces have served to shape the multidimensional (intellectual, cultural, social and emotional) reality of the Black male and his success
- how out of class engagement impacts the academic success of Black males

Research Questions

This study explores and employs an anti-deficit informed approach to explain how Black males traverse institutional inopportunity and defeat educational and societal barriers to achieve academic success. The intent of this research is to provide counter-narratives to deficit-based institutional inopportunity as told by academically successful Black males. Within the context of the study, the overarching question is:

How can the voices of college educated Black males inform efforts to promote success among Black males educated in urban environments?

Subsequently, the guiding research questions are:

1. How did Black males leverage the various resources within their social networks to develop an achievement persona and persist academically?
2. How did Black males negotiate social networks within Black communities?
3. How did Black males benefit from social networks within Black communities?
4. How did out of class learning experiences contribute to the academic success of Black males in college?

Significance of the Problem

The most recent state at a glance report highlights the school enrollment, performance data, measurement of academic success, and college readiness standards for the high school the participants attended (State at a Glance Report, 2015). In an analysis of this data, the following information stood out: Aim Academy High School (pseudonym) experienced fluctuating student enrollment numbers over a period of four years. In one year, student enrollment decreased by 147 students and didn't increase until three years later. Likewise, the performance data (reading, math, science) shows a total of 3% - 9% of the entire student population meeting standard. No student exceeded the standard. In relation to the academic success standard, 3% of the total student population met the standard. Similarly, 3% of the total student population were reported as being ready for college work. Given these statistics, it is evident that the men included in this study were exemplars given the under-performance of the high school they attended. These men represent the 3% shown in the data. Research on such individuals is needed to challenge the stereotype that success is not possible from such environments.

Significance of the Study

Researching the stages of institutional inopportunity, as experienced by Black males, bears great significance as we strive to examine the challenges faced by young Black men in America. Children are suffering from a toxic cocktail of poverty, illiteracy, racial discrimination, and massive incarceration that sentences poor boys to dead-end and hopeless lives states Marian Edelman, president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund. The state of public education, as it relates to Black males, continues to be a national disaster. We have to consider ways to situate Black men for educational success at the earliest possible stage.

The impact of this work has great benefit for the school and academic community as the counternarratives of the participants will add value to the discourse surrounding the academic success of Black males. Similarly, parents, the school and its related stakeholders will be best served by deepening their overall understanding of what it takes for Black males to successfully navigate periods of institutional inopportunity and challenges presented by society. Further, the conversation and scholarship on the topic of Black male academic success will be enhanced through the deconstruction of current and relevant literature.

Definition of Terms

As a reader, it is important to have a clear understanding of the terms used in the research. The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study. Some of the terms have special meaning to the study

and some are terms that are not widely used. As an added note, the terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout the study.

- *Academic Success*: successful completion from a 2- or 4-year institution of higher education
- *Achievement Gap*: The term refers to the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The National Governors' Association describes the achievement gap as a matter of race and class; and as one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face (National Governors' Association, 2005).
- *African American Male*: males who are a part of an ethnic group of Americans with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa
- *Anti-Deficit Scholarship*: An approach created by Harper (2012) that leads to understanding Black male success by emphasizing institutional racism as a barrier to academic achievement rather than individual responsibility
- *Deficit Thinking*: defined by Valencia (1997) and Skrla and Scheurich (2001) as the governing epistemology that informs the quality of education and educational leadership for many economically, linguistically, and culturally diverse children in America
- *Institutional Inopportunity*: periods of time, as experienced by the Black male, when they are not given fair and equal access to educational opportunities

- *Opportunity Gap*: shifts our attention from outcomes to inputs; to the deficiencies in the foundational components of societies, schools, and communities that produce significant differences in educational; and ultimately socioeconomic outcomes (Welner & Carter, 2013).
- *The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)*: the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education (Ed.gov, p. 6)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic achievement of African American males in PK-12 schools has been the subject of a growing number of scholarly works over the past three decades (Brown & Davis, 2000; Harper, 2009; Swanson, Cunningham & Spencer, 2003). Much of this work has been concerned with the identification of informative research, effective strategies, and critical concepts that seek to address two concerns: (a) explanations for the persistent underachievement of African American males in U.S. schools and society, and (b) potential interventions that can help improve the educational aspirations and life changes of African American males (Howard, 2014).

Many of the challenges that Black males encounter are not drastically different from those encountered by other males of color, namely, Latino, Southeast Asian, and Native American males (Castagno, Brayboy, & McKinley, 2008; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 1996, 2008). Previous literature has examined some of the struggles Black males experience in the educational setting; however, there is still a need to examine a larger body of research that helps us understand the general trends, academic resilience of Black males, as well as overall recommendations for future research.

Black males constitute close to 4 million, or 7%, of the U.S. student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Like any other subgroup, Black males possess a number of overlapping identities and diverse experiences (Howard, 2014). The dominant narrative of the Black male views this population as harmful, disrespectful, academically

inept**,** hyper-masculine and reclusive (Harper, 2009; 2012). Some studies have gone further and characterized Black males as an endangered species (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis & Jordon, 1994). As a result, this assessment of Black males affects their schooling experience and how these students ultimately approach the learning process (Harper, 1996; Martino & Meyenn, 2002). Since the 1980s, one of the most actively debated topics in education has been the poor academic performance of Black males in the United States (Robinson & Werblow, 2013). A report by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2012) found that only 57% of Black males graduate from high school with a traditional diploma. In 2010, only 31% of Black males between the ages of 18-24 were enrolled either in college or graduate school (NCES, 2012). Twenty years ago, almost 90% of high school dropouts could find regular work (Howard, p. 10). In the 21st century only one-third to one-half of dropouts find full-time employment, and only 11% of those jobs offer more than poverty wages (Anyon, 2005). While the overall academic performance of Black males has enticed our social and intellectual imagination, little is understood about the steps that could be taken to redirect these students' educational paths (Robinson & Werblow, 2013; Davis, 2003).

The present research examines a review of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, specifically focusing on counterstorytelling as a methodological tool to reconceptualize research with Black males. Likewise, a review of Blackmaleness will outline the stages that Black males undergo as they negotiate periods of institutional inopportunity. Institutional inopportunity, as defined in Chapter 1, represents periods of

time, as experienced by Black males, when they are not given fair and equal access to educational opportunities

The purpose of this literature review is to reveal the ways in which community transference, collective wisdom, and the shared language of academic success contribute to academic success among Black male college graduates from urban communities.

Conceptual Framework

The permanence of race and racism, the ability of Black males to traverse institutional inopportunity, the lived experiences of Black males, the developmental process that successful Black males undergo, and the impact of the educational environment on Black males are all significant correlates to understanding Black male success. These factors will collectively guide this study. Jointly, Critical Race Theory and Blackmaleness are the chief, binding conceptual frameworks that will support this study.

This literature review begins with a conceptual framework of how the researcher will define, employ, and advance theories of research in critical race studies and Blackmaleness among Black male college graduates from urban academic environments. While other complementary theories will be explored as a means to frame the study, the aforementioned are the two principal guiding theories. Specific focus will be given to the counter narratives of academically successful Black men and the developmental stages they undergo.

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory was derived during the mid-1970s as a response to the failure of Critical Legal Studies to adequately address the effects of race and racism in U.S. jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Critical Race Theory

developed initially from the work of legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) who were concerned with challenging racial orthodoxy in the legal arena (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Critical Race Theory first emerged as a counter-legal scholarship to the positivist and liberal discourse of civil rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical Race Theory was a response to the slow pace of racial reform in the United States during the post-civil rights movement era, and the emergence of neo-conservative policies of the 1980s (Bell, 1992, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2000), the Critical Race Theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power.

Within the span of the last two decades, Critical Race Theory has become an increasingly permanent fixture in the toolkit of educational researchers seeking to critically examine educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). To better understand the complexities of the social construction of race in America, we need to explore Black children, who they are, what they think of themselves, and how the world perceives them. In particular, and for this study, the researcher will focus on the Black male, his self-perception, and how the world views him.

Critical Race Theory begins with the notion that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society (Delgado, 1995), and because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture. Second, Critical

Race Theory departs from mainstream legal scholarship by sometimes employing storytelling to analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Blacks and other minorities "one-down" (Delgado, p. 14). Third, Critical Race Theory insists on a critique of liberalism. Crenshaw (1988) argued that the liberal perspective of the civil rights crusade as a long, slow, but always upward pull is flawed because it fails to understand the limits of current legal paradigms to serve as catalysts for social change and its emphasis on incrementalism. Critical Race Theory argues that racism requires sweeping changes, but liberalism has no mechanism for such change (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Fourth, and related to the liberal perspective, Crenshaw (1988) makes the argument posed by Critical Race Theory that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation.

In order to effectively analyze the experiences of historically underrepresented populations, scholars have studied Critical Race Theory as both an epistemological and methodological tool, Huber, 2008. Critical Race Theory, in education, is used to analyze social inequity that is covertly demonstrated through racist practices within academic institutions (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Critical Race Theory, used within the field of education, is an evolving, methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct that attempts to examine and disrupt race and racism found in the schooling system (Solorzano, 1998). Critical Race Theory has evolved over years as an important construct in the study of education because of its strong focus on centering the concept of race in education as a socio-cultural context that challenges dominant discourses (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

According to Solorzano and Yosso (2000), Critical Race Theory in education is defined as

> a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain a marginal position and subordination of [Black and Latino] students. Critical Race Theory asks such questions as: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination?

In the mid-1990s, researchers in the area of education started making extensive use of Critical Race Theory in their analyses of the American educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Dixson, 2006). Lynn & Parker (2006) have attempted to historicize Critical Race Theory by asserting that early scholars in the field of education established several key features of Critical Race Theory related to the basic nature of race in society.

Initially, critical race theorists viewed the racism that exists in the United States as "a normal fact of daily life in U.S. society" (Taylor, 2009). In support of this idea are ideologies and assumptions of White supremacy which are ingrained in the country's political, legal, and educational structures in ways that seemingly make them unrecognizable (Delgado, 1995). Secondly, critical race theorists viewed the structure of White supremacy as having a significant effect on the world and representing an "all-encompassing and omnipresent" (Taylor, p. 4) system of privilege, power, and opportunities that are often times invisible to its own beneficiaries. Third, they advocated a strong critique of liberalism as a supporting ideology for a just and equal society

(Jennings, 2014). Critical Race Theory advocates are skeptical that the current paradigms utilized by government institutions can be catalysts for social change given the emphasis on incrementalism that is ingrained in these institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) further expanded these concepts by discussing several important ideas that helped explain the use of Critical Race Theory as a lens for the study of inequality in education. These ideas included the following: (a) developing critiques that address multiple discourses on race, gender, and class while emphasizing how these forms of subordination intersect in complex ways; (b) challenging dominant ideologies that support deficit theorizing in educational and social science discourses; (c) focusing on the experiences of students and communities of color with oppression; (d) emphasizing work that advocates social justice in education as part of a larger effort to challenge all forms of subordination in society; and (e) utilizing the knowledge and base of interdisciplinary academic disciplines such as ethnic studies, women's studies, and law to better understand the experiences of students and communities of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race scholars (Stovall, 2004; Stovall, Lynn, Danley, & Manley, 2009; Yamamoto, 1997) suggested that critical race praxis combines critical perspectives and pragmatic approaches to effectively navigate and survive within U.S. society's dominant White mainstream and linked these perspectives and approaches to practices by and for communities of color. This combination resulted in a type of critical race praxis that provides us with a useful way of gauging innovative approaches to schooling and education of African Americans and other historically disenfranchised communities

(Hayes, 2014). Critical race praxis is aimed at giving students of color the tools required to successfully combat forces pulling them toward the contemporary school-to-prison pipeline and educational failure (Hayes, p. 259).

Counterstorytelling. An essential tenet of Critical Race Theory is counterstorytelling (Matsuda, 1995). Counterstorytelling has been an important feature of educational research that employed a Critical Race Theory framework (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Counterstorytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes (Decuir & Dixson, p. 27). The use of counterstories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In education, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) suggested that counterstories can be found in various forms, including personal stories/narratives, other people's stories/narratives, and composite stories/narratives. Primarily, and for the purpose of this study, focus will be given to counterstorytelling as a methodological tool to reconceptualize research with African American males. This study employs a Critical Race Theory lens as a way to present the narratives and voices of academically successful Black males raised in urban environments.

The use of a master narrative to represent a group is bound to provide a very narrow depiction of what it means to be African-American, Mexican-American, White, and so on (McMahon, 2003). A master narrative essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group's cultural life (Montecinos, 1995). A monovocal account will engender not only stereotyping, but also curricular choices that result in representations in which

fellow members of a group represented cannot recognize themselves (Montecinos, p. 293). These single-sided, imbalanced stories about the low educational achievement of students of color are supported within the context of racism. Furthermore, these majoritarian stories share the theme of racial (White) privilege and include stories of gender, class, and other categories of privilege (Solorzano, 2002). Whether we refer to them as monovocals, master narratives, standard stories, or majoritarian stories, it is important to recognize the power of White privilege in constructing stories about race (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Counterstorytelling, on the other hand, presents a different, yet relative account of a marginalized group, particularly Blacks. Counterstorytelling is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). It is a useful tool for revealing, examining, and confronting majoritarian stories of privilege. Moreover, counterstorytelling serves to enrich the unheard historical narratives of people of color. One of the glaring absences of much of the research associated with African American males is that it has not included first hand, detailed accounts from African American males about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism play in their educational experiences (Howard, 2014). It is the value of experiential knowledge that may offer important opportunities for new research paradigms, particularly those centered on the manifestations of race and racism (Howard, p. 58). The use of narratives and storytelling offers what Tillman (2002) refers to as culturally sensitive research approaches for African American students. Tillman describes these approaches as interpretive paradigms that offer greater possibilities for the use of alternative frameworks,

co-constructions of multiple realities and experiences, and knowledge that can lead to improved educational opportunities for African Americans (Tillman, p. 5).

A relatively small number of studies have documented African American students' perspectives of their learning environments (Howard, 2001; Lee, 1999; Noguera, 2003; Price, 2000; Waxman & Huang, 1997), but even fewer have used Critical Race Theory or comparable theoretical frameworks to examine how African American males interpret their schooling experiences (Howard, 2014). Harper (2015) conducted a study of 325 college-bound juniors and seniors who attended 40 New York City public high schools in which visual sociology and critical race methodologies were used to construct anti-deficit counternarratives about boys of color and urban education. Duncan and Jackson (2004) sought to privilege the voice of those who bear the brunt of inequalities in schools through the use of a post-critical approach to examine the schooling inequities of African American males at a Midwest high school. By centering the voices of young Black males and their schooling experiences, this study highlighted the political nature of language in schools, and how African American males made sense of schooling in an environment that many of them felt was inherently unjust (Duncan & Jackson, p. 3). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) used Critical Race Theory as a methodological tool to shed light on the experience of African American studies at Wells Academy, a private school located in a predominately White, affluent southeastern city. DeCuir and Dixson used a counterstorytelling approach to uncover the persistent and subtle acts of racism that students experienced at the school with regularity (Howard, 2014). The aforementioned research gave agency to African American males to offer narratives that can counter many

of the rhetorical accounts of their identities that frequently describe them as culturally and socially deficient, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual (Howard, p. 65).

One of the glaring absences of much of the research associated with African American males is that it has not included firsthand, detailed accounts from African American males about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism play in their educational experiences (Howard, 2014). Critical Race Theory encourages participants to openly examine marginalized practices and share their counter narratives related to societal and institutional adversity (Yosso, 2005). It allows participants to share their accounts of marginalization which challenges the majoritarian ideology. This study will explore how Black men achieved academic success within the context of the intercentricity of race and racism and other forms of subordination; (i.e., being Black, male, and of low SES) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is important that their voices be recognized as a critical tool to their own survival and liberation. Critical Race Theory is a practical theoretical framework to employ in an attempt to counter dominant societal narratives concerning Black male youth and achievement (Masko, 2008).

Blackmaleness. In an effort to advance the dialogue about Black male success, it is necessary to explain the developmental process that Black males undergo as they negotiate periods of institutional inopportunity. This process corresponds with the theoretical framework, Blackmaleness. Blackmaleness is the multidimensional, shifting, and oftentimes contradictory reality of Black males (James & Lewis, 2014). Anzaldua (1990, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) argued that researchers examining

underrepresented, marginalized groups of people should employ new theories to aid in the understanding of their experiences. While periods of inopportunity are intimidating and often times discouraging for the Black male, successful navigation is possible, producing academic and career triumphs (James & Lewis, p. 273). Understanding the extremes of Blackmaleness and what it takes for a Black male to travel through the "void" is critical. The void represents the life experiences of and reality of the Black male through both opportunity and inopportunity and is transparent between both social extremes (James & Lewis, p. 273). The two extremes are outlined below:

> *Subtractive extreme of Blackmaleness:* a nexus of social limitations, messaged and materialized as an inescapable, but navigable system of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunities with the absolute disenfranchisement of Black males as a chief end. (James & Lewis, p. 273).
>
> *Productive extreme of Blackmaleness:* transgenerational collective force, organized to contest, defy, resist, and persist, despite the presence of social barriers particularly constructed to make war with the potential of Black males in American society and education. (James & Lewis, p. 273)

Both extremes are unavoidable, but are certainly traversable systems. It is not practical to discuss the experience of the successful Black male without having the proper knowledge of their unique life voyage. Traversing the void is a required and recursive experience over the course of life and career development among Black males (James & Lewis, 2014).

Scholarly insight into Blackmaleness identifies *difference makers*, who are primarily parents, family, community members and educators, who have had a positive impact on the life experiences of the Black male. James and Lewis (2014) highlight the work of Black educators as playing a critical role in the academic and cultural development of Black males. Black males identify Black educators as difference makers not solely based on race, but their ability to authentically care and respond to the needs of Black students (James & Lewis, p. 273).

Blackmaleness is also defined as the individually unique, yet collective developmental needs and processes experienced by Black male learners situated within the American inopportunity/opportunity structure (James & Lewis, 2014). It is necessary to have a sophisticated awareness of how the layers of Blackmaleness contribute to the educational success of the Black male. Gaining a deeper understanding of how Black males are socially constructed, the details of their institutional experiences, and the factors responsible for attributing to their success are an integral part of this entire process. Becoming grounded in the foundation of Blackmaleness requires further exploration into other sub-theories and frameworks that attribute to Black male success. To add value to the basis on which Blackmaleness was developed, the following sub-topics will be explored: Black male identity, and resilience.

Black male identity. It has long been recognized that schools are important sites for gender role socialization, places where children learn the meaning of race and are primary sites for instruction about the values and norms associated with citizenship (Noguera, 2003; Loewen, 1995, Spring, 1994). Schools are places where students learn

about race through the hidden or informal curriculum (Apple, 1982). Research has documented how the complexity of identity, race, and schooling intersect to shape the experiences of young people (Howard, 2014). Even when teachers do not speak explicitly about race and racial issues with children, children become aware of physical differences related to race quite early (Tronyna & Carington, 1990). While schools are certainly not the only places where children formulate view about race, students are more likely to encounter persons of another race or ethnic group in this setting (Peshkin, 1991). This plays a central role in individual characterization and race relations in the greater community and larger society. The structure and culture of a school play a major role in reinforcing and maintaining racial categories and the stereotypes associated with them (Noguera, 2003).

Fordham (1988) sought to explore the process by which African American students achieve success. Her findings implied that in order achieve academic success, African American students must disassociate themselves from their respective African American communities. Fordham further asserted that these students must leave behind cultural values, inherent beliefs, and traditional customs in order to embrace the culture of the school, arguing that Black students hold themselves back out of fear that they will be ostracized by their peers. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) described this phenomenon as the "burden of acting white", which they argued has to do with the widespread idea that academic success is a White characteristic. The eventual outcome is the creation of African American oppositional identities within the school community. While their work has received considerable recognition over time, these researchers did not acknowledge

the dynamic that occurs between Black students, males in particular, and the culture that is operative within schools (Noguera, 2003). While Black males may engage in behaviors that add to their underachievement, they are more likely to be involuntarily pushed into marginal roles and be discouraged from challenging their abilities (Noguera, p. 445).

Ward (1990) presented an alternative explanation for academically successful African American high school students. Her findings suggested that racial identity, personal commitment, and academic achievement successfully come together during the high school years. Ward reported that students felt good about their race and were personally strengthened by their racial status (Howard, 2014). She emphasized how important it is for African American students to reject society's negative assessment of Blackness and subsequently construct identities that value their own culture.

Resilience. Resilience among African-Americans has a complex history and research tradition, and includes the Black family, extended family, kinship networks and the Black church (Hargrett, 2014). Resilience is defined as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). In order for an individual to be considered resilient, they must meet two conditions: (a) exposure to substantial risk, trauma, and/or severe adversity, and (b) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major risks and/or adversity (Woodland, 2016). The term resilient is applied to youth who are considered vulnerable or at increased likelihood to experience negative outcomes associated with risk, but are somehow able to avoid these outcomes and mature into psychologically healthy adults (Woodland, p. 771).

During the 1970's scientists and pioneers pointed out that exposure to risks served to lock some kids into negative outcomes, while other youth who faced similar risks developed relatively unharmed (Rutter, 1979; Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1977). The factors that fostered positive adaptation in the midst of significant adversity eventually became known as protective factors as they protect or buffer against and in some cases, counteract the negative effects caused by exposure to risks or adversity (Luthar et al., 2000, Rutter, 1979; Woodland, 2016; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

In the social sciences, primarily education, resilience depicts an individual's aptitude to succeed in the face of adversity or hardship (Nettles, Mucherah, & Jones, 2000). Wang (1994) defined educational resilience as the likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities, brought on by early traits, conditions, and experiences. Henderson and Milstein (1996) defined resilience as the capacity to spring back, rebound, and successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today's world. Within the context of education, resilient students succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003).

Hill (1972) described five common characteristics that support and add value to notions of resilience observed in African-Americans, including adaptable family roles, extended family and kinship networks, and work ethic. Hill's research explained how gender roles within African-American families are typically flexible with shared decision-making, as are responsibilities for financial support, household care, and child care. Hill

explained how parenting takes on a co-parenting model, with responsibilities being spread out not only between mothers and fathers but also with grandparents and other adult relatives, and often times siblings. Although boundaries for a few African-American families can become too blurred for effective functioning for some families, this characteristic is generally seen as a strength with obvious advantages for handling crises (Hargrett, 2014).

The extended family has also been a recognized support structure within the African American community, further helping with the survivability and resiliency of the African-American family (Wallace & Fisher, 2007). Extended family support systems contribute to the resiliency seen in African-American families. Extended family support systems lead to *fictive kinships* whereas several generations of extended family members and fictive kin may live together to maintain a strong network of social and economic support (Beck & Beck, 1984; 1989; Wilson, 1989). Fictive kinships refer to people within a given society to whom one is not related by birth but with whom one shares essential reciprocal social and economic relationships (Fordham, 1996). Wallace and Fisher (2007) described an extended family as a close network of relationships within and between families who may or may not be related (Wallace and Fisher, p. 443). The extended family remains a major support structure within the African-American community assisting with the sharing and exchanging of resources and experiences needed to address the needs of families within the community that go beyond the capacity of the immediate family unit to meet (Wallace & Fisher, 2007; Fordham, 2000).

Despite what appears to be an insurmountable accumulation of risks, the majority of Black males do complete high school (Harper, 2012), more Black males are in college than ever before (Harper, 2009), most do not engage in serious violent behavior, and the vast majority of these young men maintain generally positive outcomes (Cook & Cordova, 2007). Assets such as easy temperament, positive coping strategies, high self-esteem, and positive future outlook appear to be just as protective for high risk Black males as other groups (Li, Nussbaum, & Richards, 2007). Other resourceful factors, as identified in the resilience literature, are supportive parents, caring extra-familial adults, effective teachers, high socioeconomic status, and safe neighborhoods that all serve to protect young, urban Black males from violence involvement and academic failure (Li et al., 2007; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Factors Promoting the Success of Black Males

Parenting Black males. For many years, society has attempted to use a one size fits all pattern for raising children (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013). Since White America is looked upon as the leading, dominant race, it is implied that if the parenting rules work for White children, then the same should apply to children of color. Black parents have always stressed to their children the importance of exceeding White children's behavior and performance because falling short would reflect unfavorably among the group (Hale-Benson, 1982). Nobles (1975) pointed out that the task of the Black family has been to prepare its children to live and be among White people without *becoming* White.

While some aspects of parenting are universal, parents of color must raise their children in race- or ethnicity-specific ways for their children to fulfill their potential

(Brewster & Stephenson, 2013). Likewise, while the parents of Black and White boys have many experiences in common (protecting their emotional well-being, channeling their rambunctiousness, dealing with schools that have been structured for the learning styles of girls, protecting them from bullying), White parents do not have to prepare their boys to deal with a society that stereotypes and views them as dangerous in the same way (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013). Moreover, White parents do not have to consciously safeguard their boys from the harmful effects of media portrayal and projections (Brewster & Stephenson, p. 129).

In order to unveil the multiple layers involved in producing academically successful Black men, we must understand how they, as a whole, have been raised and/or conditioned in the home setting. Black parents have long sought out effective ways to reimagine a language that speaks to Black male success. African American male adolescents living in high-risk neighborhoods face considerable challenges as they move through adolescence into young adulthood (Anderson, 1999; Harding, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Successful adolescent development, for Black males living in high-risk communities, is a parenting concern for many (Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005). Since the core of this study focuses on Black males from high-risk communities, it is important to consider the appropriate parenting strategies that work for these children and how they are racially socialized.

Spirituality. Spirituality has been found to be a positive contributor to Black male success in colleges (Wood & Harris, 2014). Many African Americans are raised in homes where God and spirituality are of utmost importance (Gregg, 2014). Serving as a space

where spirituality and education converge, the Black church has been and continues to be a reservoir and resource for educational advancement for Black people (Douglass & Peck, 2013).

Wood and Hilton (2012) found that spirituality and a belief in God aided Black male achievement by serving as an inspiration for excellence, providing a more focused purpose in life, enabling students to overcome societal barriers, reducing relational distractions, and allowing Black men to feel a sense of support when involved in isolating environments. Many African American males value spiritual and religious support as a dynamic impacting their success (Hargrove, 2014).

The Black men in this study discussed how they found sources of strength to help them navigate their paths. One of those support systems was the church. Black and Latino male students stated the physical spaces (e.g. parks, community centers, churches, etc.) in their community are needed to cultivate and sustain their social networks (Howard & Associates, 2017). Fostering resiliency is shaped and interpreted differently by every individual, but is a vital internal tool for Black men (Howard & Associates, p. 29). These networks are important and instrumental in building resiliency and fostering high levels of community proactivity.

Based on historical and empirical research findings, researchers argue that educational actors (including teachers, administrators, policy makers, and researchers) focused on seemingly school based issues, like the academic achievement gap, would do well to recognize the impact that learning spaces outside of schools may have on student scholastic success, particularly for men of color (Douglass & Peck, p. 2013). Having

mentorship opportunities with community members, such as church leaders, can help bridge the gap between Black boys and the educational, mentorship, and positive reinforcement services they need during their pursuit of educational and lifelong success (Goings, Smith, Harris, Wilson, & Lancaster, 2015). Rather than suggesting Black students distance themselves from their communities a more meaningful approach would be to celebrate community, encouraging students to work to support one another in ways that improve their community and the country (Toldson & Johns, 2016).

Racial socialization. Central to the conversation surrounding Black male success are protective factors that help shield Black males from violence and violent behavior. The alarming levels of violence in the lives of Black youth, and their disproportionate arrest and incarceration (Briggs & McBeath, 2010), justify the exploration of pathways to build the resilience of Black American youth and lessen the impact of the risk factors leading to aggressive behavior. Because of the prevalence of violence among African American male youth and its consequences for their health, safety, and developmental outcomes, it is important to explore culturally relevant protective factors that may lessen the effects of the risk factors for violent behavior (Graves, Kaslow, & Frabutt, 2010). One protective factor that is culturally rooted in the lives and experiences of African American people is racial socialization (DeGruy, Kjellstrand, Briggs, & Brennan, 2012). Racial socialization is considered, in many cases, a parenting style for African American parents.

Racial socialization refers to the process by which parents transmit both implicit and explicit messages about the meaning of one's race in a broader societal context (Coard & Sellers, 2005). It is a leading aspect of parenting among African Americans (Hughes &

Johnson, 2001), and one that routinely focuses on cultural socialization (messages about cultural heritage, cultural traditions, racial pride) and preparation for bias (messages about racial discrimination and strategies for coping with discrimination) (Hughes et al. 2006).

Adolescent racial identity is the most commonly investigated outcome of parents' racial socialization, a pattern attributable to the fact that the goal of many racial socialization practices is instilling a sense of racial pride and cultural knowledge in children (Hughes et al. 2006) and the fact that the development of racial identity among African Americans is a prominent psychosocial task during the adolescent years (Phinney, 1989).

Scholarly research has suggested that racial socialization messages are a routine part of the parenting practices for most African American parents (Hughes, 2003). Racial socialization generally refers to the process of socializing children about the significance and meaning of race, taking place through explicit and non-explicit messages about race (Hughes & Chen, 1997). For African American single parents, preparing young sons to function in U.S. society requires one to consider African Americans' unique social position, in addition to the socialization that parents of all races and ethnicities undergo (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Caughy et al. (2002) asserted that African American parents routinely engage in racial socialization practices as part of their parenting repertoire. Defining racial socialization has become a seemingly complex task as there are many associated themes involved. For example, some researchers defined racial socialization simply as the transmittal of values, attitudes, and behaviors that help prepare future generations for possible negative race-related experiences, while others

conceptualize it as a process of helping future generations develop a positive racial identity (Barr & Neville, 2008; Demo & Hughes, 1990). Other researchers combined multiple functions, conceptualizing it as communicating behaviors and messages to African American children to enhance their sense of racial/ethnic identity, partially in preparation for racially hostile encounters (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011). According to Fatimilehin (1999), most racial socialization definitions included the issue of coping in an oppressive environment. Most studies that have documented a relationship between racial discrimination and academic outcomes in African-American males state that this relationship is guided by African-American males' race-relevant experiences or beliefs (Wong, 2003). Positive racial socialization is a race-relevant experience that seemingly ameliorates the negative impact racial discrimination experiences impose on African American males' academic outcomes (Neblett Jr., Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Smalls, 2010).

Several studies have found that aspects of racial/ethnic identity are related to academic outcomes among racial/ethnic minority youth (Tang, McLoyd, & Hallman, 2016). Among African American adolescents, pro-Black attitudes and psychological connectedness to the Black community have been linked to positive academic efficacy, attitudes, and behavior (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001; Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Selassie, & Smith, 1999), and positive private regard is associated with increased school attachment, academic efficacy, grades, and standardized test scores (Chavous et al. 2003; Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003). On the contrast, awareness of

racism and barriers (i.e., negative public regard) has been associated with lower grades and standardized test scores (Oyserman et al. 2001; Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003).

With respect to student's performance, research has generally established positive and significant links between racial-ethnic socialization subconstructs, and grades and standardized test scores, although the particulars vary across studies (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Brown, Linver, Evans, & Degennaro, 2009; Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2011; Smith, C.O., Levine, Smith, E.P., Dumas, & Prinz, 2009; Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003; Wang & Huguley, 2012). In a national study of 377 African American youth between ages 14 and 24, Bowman and Howard (1985) found that youth who received racial socialization messages that emphasized awareness of barriers, and egalitarianism were associated with high grades at school.

A study conducted by Banjerjee, Harrell, & Johnson (2011), supported the idea that children show improved socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes when engaged in racial socialization practices. In an attempt to uncover the ways in which parents convey racial socialization messages, Hughes et al. (2006) disaggregated previous research studies based upon those studies' methodology and findings. Their thorough systematic literature review revealed parents impart the following messages: (a) cultural socialization or enculturation, (b) promotion of discrimination awareness and coping strategies, (c) encouragement of caution during interracial interactions, and/or (d) encouragement of egalitarianism or even color-blindness (Hubbard, Lewis, & Johnson, 2014).

Lesane-Brown (2006) denoted African American parents' racial socialization messages in three categories: (a) Culture Messages, (b) Minority Experiences, and (c) Mainstream Experiences. Culture Messages emphasized teaching children about their culture and promoting racial pride. Minority Experiences described messages detailing one's oppressive position in America's hierarchical society. Mainstream Experiences described messages that highlight one's personal qualities while deemphasizing race.

A study conducted by Hubbard, Lewis, & Johnson (2014) sought to determine how African American single mothers used racial socialization to influence school readiness and academic achievement in their sons. The findings indicated that these mothers used racial socialization to define and promote academic success. From having an impact on their son's self-image to recruiting role models, these mothers connected race with every facet of teaching and raising their sons (Hubbard, Lewis, & Johnson, p. 27). All mothers were deliberate about instilling in their sons a sense of Black pride so that they were better prepared for impending racial discrimination. Additionally, all mothers told their sons that sometimes people will mistreat them because they are Black; this includes teachers and others in authoritative positions. Racial socialization prepares young Black males for potential unjust and unethical treatment in society due to their ethnic background. Essentially, to raise physically and emotionally healthy African American males, parents must buffer information about race (Murray, Bynum, Brody, Wilert, & Stephens, 2001; Stacey, 2007), all while communicating messages of racial pride and overall resilience.

Significance of education. Education is a democratic right and bears foundational significance to future success. Our public education system remains the best vehicle and

platform to deliver many of the supports necessary to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males, 2015). Preparing our youth to attain a high school diploma puts them in a position for postsecondary training and education, further creating an avenue to escape the societal setbacks induced by poverty. Kristoff (2014) defined education as being the "escalator out of poverty", thereby creating state and local ecosystems that provide healthy living and learning communities with the necessary supports to provide all students an opportunity to learn, including Black males.

High expectations for Black males must never be compromised based on mere perceptions of their assumed lack of engagement or resilience in school (Howard, Douglas, & Warren, 2016). It is essential for practitioners to resist the notion that Black youth enjoy failure or do not want to be educated (Harris, 2011), because the reality is that Black males indeed care a lot about their schooling (Harper & Davis, 2012). Adults must be made aware that "to promote resilient academic outcomes, efforts must not focus on Black males as perpetrators of bravado attitudes" (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). Regardless of the persona that Black males project, there must be an unwavering commitment to see them as able, human, with unlimited potential to produce at high levels (Howard, Douglas, & Warren, 2016, p. 3). Displays of toughness by Black males should signal the need for a clearer understanding of the processes informing how Black boys experience the school environment and interactions with adults (Noguera, 2003). Raising expectations means adapting the school environment to become places where Black males

perceive teachers as sources of support and affirmation, and the curriculum as challenging and relevant (Milner, McGee, Pabon, & Woodson, 201

After school programs. During the late 1960s and 1970s, inner-city after-school programs were highlighted as a part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty (Woodland, 2016). The War on Poverty initiatives coincided with increasing urban decay, unprecedented numbers of women entering the formal workforce and leaving children at home unattended, and an explosion of illegal, street-level narcotics in urban centers (Lopoo, 2005; Wilson, 1996). These drastic societal changes increased the youth vulnerability to risky environments, and necessitated the need for after-school programs to provide safety and supervised recreation during the after-school period (Woodland, p. 778).

Scholarly research on Black and Latino males is dominated with deficit thinking, descriptions of oppositional behaviors and students' lack of positive social and academic growth in the educational setting (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, p. 396). Few studies (Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Harper & Associates, 2014; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; Toldson & Lewis, 2012; Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009) highlight the positive relationships Black and Latino males have with school. In an effort to increase the well-being of Black males, after-school programs are seen as a resource that harbors promise (Woodland, 2016).

Research suggests that for all groups, including young Black males, the after-school period is important and unique (Woodland, 2008). It is often during the after-school hours that most children are left unsupervised while parents work for at least a couple of

hours after the school day ends (National Institute on Out-of-School Time [NIOST], 2004). In part because of the lack of supervision, it is after school when most youth fall victim or become involved with violence and crime (NIOST, 2004). After-school programs were developed as a method to curb post-school loitering and public nuisance, particularly among low-income youth (Halpern, 2002). After-school programs can provide a constructive and safe environment that protects children in urban neighborhoods during a time when youth crime is at its peak (Woodland, p. 538).

After-school programs are diverse institutions that operate during the non-school hours, including after school, on weekends, and sometimes during the summer, to provide academic as well as nonacademic activities for youth (Woodland, 2008). Some after-school programs are connected to schools and referred to as extended-day programs and others are community-based organizations (Fashola, 2003) while other after-school programs exclusively focus on increasing academic achievement and aim for social inclusion and emotional well-being (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). Research with African American children has highlighted the importance of after-school programs in their lives (Woodland, p. 778). After a 1980 Carnegie Foundation report revealed that the peak hours for the increasing juvenile crime were between 3p.m. and 6p.m., after-school programs were identified as a possible remedy to protect and engage unsupervised youth during the high-risk after-school period (Woodland, p. 539). Working with a low-income African-American population, Posner and Vandell (1994) pointed out the positive effects of child participation in after-school programs as compared to other after-school settings. Their study found that low-income African American children, who attended

after-school programs, routinely performed better in core academic subjects than did their peers who took care of themselves, had maternal care, or had informal adult supervision during the after-school hours. Despite the emerging status of after-school program research, researchers, community members, and government legislators have cited the promise of after-school programs (Congressional Record, 2001; Fashola, 2003; Halpern, 2003; Hirsch, 2005; Mason-Dixon Polling, & Research, 2002; Posner & Vandell, 1994, Quinn, 1999; Woodland, 2008, Woodland, Martin, Hill & Worrell, 2009).

After-school programs, with their focus on education and creating safe environments, are uniquely suited to meet the needs of young Black males who, because of inadequate schooling and often residing in underserved neighborhoods, continue to be plagued by poorer health and academic outcomes more than other racial groups (Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 1995; Skolnick & Currie, 1994). In a study utilizing urban and low-income youth, Posner and Vandell (1994) indicated that after-school program attendance was associated with improved academic performance, better conduct in school, better peer relations, and greater emotional adjustment. Researchers have also indicated that youth who attend after-school programs tend to maintain higher grade-point averages, have less school absences, and are less likely to engage in violence (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Kane, 2004).

In addition to examining the impact of after-school programs on urban youth in general, a smaller group of researchers have considered the important contributions after-school programs can have on the lives of young Black males (Fashola, 2003; Woodland, 2008). Due to the high rates of academic failure and violence exposure among these young

men, Woodland (2008) and Fashola (2003) have argued that after school programs, which have flexible curriculums, provide protection from violence, and additional opportunities for academic development and are uniquely qualified to buffer against the specific risks faced by urban young Black males.

School-based mentoring programs. Scholars have documented how Black males often are analyzed, scrutinized, and dissected, and in the process not seen in a more human context as in need of encouragement, support, and mentorship (Duncan, 2002, Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2001). Young Black males have noted the importance of certain mentors in their lives, whether it be fathers, mothers, siblings, extended family members or school stakeholders, who spent time with them, talked with them and helped them navigate the challenges of life (Howard, 2014). Adults (educators), who find themselves actively involved in the lives of young Black males, should see themselves as mentors with the overarching purpose of developing well-rounded, academically successful young men (Wyatt, 2009). Often times, these mentor-mentee relationships extend beyond the classroom into school-based mentoring programs. Literature on school-based mentoring suggests that mentoring relationships is often a key element in the overall success of Black and Latino male students (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). More than simply being an avenue for caring relationships to develop, school-based mentoring programs can nurture supportive relationships between adults and students (McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Randolph & Johnson, 2008). Mentoring can be understood as a one-on-one relationship in which a more experienced, often older mentor supports a less experienced, often younger mentee (Struchen & Porta, 1997; Thomson & Zan, 2010). Mentors should focus

on holding their mentees accountable, be swift with constructive criticism, but also be willing to be nurturing and provide support when needed (Howard, 2014). The outcome of such relationships can create reciprocal exchanges of trust, respect, and commitment between a mentor and his or her mentees (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). In this study, an example of an after-school program and its related academic benefits for Black males will be examined.

Imani; Project Avalanche; REAL: Respect, Excellence, Attitude, and Leadership, Mentor and Me, Brother to Brother Program, Junior Executive Leadership Program, and the Brotherhood are examples of school-based mentoring programs that are helping Black and Latino males successfully negotiate their school environments by establishing positive academic and social identities for themselves (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Hall, 2006; Wyatt, 2009; Howard, 2014). These programs focus specifically on increasing academic achievement, social behavioral results, qualitative assessments, and college-going rates among Black and Latino males, as well as developing their social-emotional skills and sense of well-being (Toldson, 2008; Howard, 2014).

Imani is the name of the after-school program acknowledged in this study. The Imani Student Development Cooperation was founded by Lila Leff in 1997 (Hargrett, 2015). Originally designed as an after-school program for students who were concerned about their community, Imani functions, within a larger internal campus capacity, on the premise that students, as members of the community, should be educated to recognize the factors internal and external to the school that impact their daily lives (Stovall, 2005). Imani is a campus-based mentoring program, housed inside of a high school in an urban

midwestern school district. It focuses on the holistic development of young men at these high schools. Imani is deliberate in its focus on the scholarly success and the social and emotional growth of the young men involved (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). Ultimately, the organization provides support to low-income, high-risk students within the public school system it serves.

The young men who become members are typically over-age, under-credited, transfer students from traditional high schools where they did not experience academic success (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). Their previous academic record causes them to feel unsuccessful in and disconnected from school (May & Copeland, 1998). To date, more than 75 young men who participated in Imani have successfully graduated high school and moved on to college (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, p. 398). Imani makes a valiant attempt to address the systemic construct of racism that has pervasively isolated children of color (Stovall, 2005).

Noguera (2012) confirmed the importance of mentoring for young males of color as he stated that research in these schools shows us that strong, positive relationships between teachers and students are critical ingredients of their success. Equally important is the need to provide a personalized learning environment with mentors, counseling, and other support that make it possible for schools to intervene early and effectively when problems arise (Noguera, p. 10). Literature on school-based mentoring suggests that mentoring relationships is often a key element in the overall success of Black and Latino male students (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014; Struchen, & Porter, 1997; Gibson, 2014). Although mentoring programs can produce positive outcomes for youth, more

research is needed that offers an account of how Black male mentors and mentees experience mentoring.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework includes several assumptions informed by Critical Race Theory and Blackmaleness, providing an intellectual framework by which this study will be conducted. This study defines an academically successful Black male as a graduate of a 2-year or 4-year institution of higher education. This study supports Harper's (2012) anti-deficit scholarship approach to understanding success by emphasizing institutional racism as a barrier to academic achievement rather than individual responsibility. This study recognizes the shared language of the community as an upholding force and strength mechanism for Black males navigating institutional inopportunity. This study will seek insight into how societal and educational forces have served to shape the multidimensional reality (intellectual, cultural, social and emotional) of the Black male and his success.

The focus for Black male achievement must be shifted from a remedy to "fix" the Black male to a remedy to "fix" the educational system that oppresses this population through systemic practices that impede Black male success. The overall aim must be to disrupt the age-old, deficit-based depictions of Black males (Howard, 2014). There is much to be said about how much any group of students can be expected to learn when they are viewed in such a negative light, as are countless numbers of Black males (Howard, p. 29). Black males should be academically situated in such a manner that they clearly recognize their own unlimited potential and benefit from the caring support of the school system.

A new language must exist to support the academic success of Black males. A paradigmatic shift suggests casting a new light, or offering a new frame, to analyze a group or a phenomenon (Howard, 2014). A paradigmatic shift affords us the opportunity to transcend dated points of view, ideas, and overall understanding (Howard, p. 19). It helps to deconstruct basic assumptions and promotes anti-deficit thinking. In constructing new knowledge about Black males, researchers need to be cognizant of the frames used to engage in the research, the questions that are posed, and the methods used to examine the subjects' experiences (Howard, p. 19). This asset-based approach recognizes the strengths, promise, and potential of students and can lead to opening up research approaches that delve into a more comprehensive, nuanced, complex, and authentic account of these students (Howard, p. 19). This study will identify the gaps in previous literature that suppress or silence the voices of young Black males. Their counterstories, which outline factors leading to their academic success, need to be heard. The actual voices of successful Black males, not researchers' interpretations, should dominate the narrative if we are to impact meaningful change in the educational arena and beyond. This study will move the discussion of Black males forward from conversations of failure to conversations of success and serve to offer an alternate portrayal of Black males in U.S. schools.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine an anti-deficit informed approach to explain how Black males, situated in a midwestern U.S. city, triumphed in the midst of societal barriers, established a pragmatic approach to self-identity, and consequently achieved post-secondary academic success. According to Holosko (2010), qualitative research is designed to document human experience and voice with rich text or thick descriptive data through the analysis of written or spoken word and observable behaviors. Over time, scholars such as Harper (2012), James and Hill-Jackson (2012), and Howard (2001) have used qualitative methodologies (interviews, focus groups, and narrative analysis) to explore educational challenges related to Black males and to provide an anti-deficit approach to analyzing the educational realities of Black males.

The goal of this research was to understand how this group of men were able to absorb their cultural context as well as effectively navigate the urban school setting, as former members of the Imani Student Development Corporation (pseudonym), in pursuit of post-secondary degree attainment. The objective was to investigate protective factors linked to academically successful Black males as end products of urban 9-12 schooling with the support of Imani Student Development Corporation. The Black males in this study emerged from varied living dynamics, ranging from one to two-parent households. The intent of this research was to provide counter-narratives, as told by academically successful Black males, to the dominant narrative about common deficit-based societal

and institutional practices. Likewise, this study highlighted emergent themes of contested prolificacy, community proactivity, familial perseverance, and the shared language of academic success and persistence as experienced by Black males as byproducts of the urban educational system in America. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research methodologies are the most useful and appropriate research tradition for this type of inquiry.

Study Design

To understand the participants' assessment of how their urban schooling experiences impacted their overall academic success, a case study design was employed. Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). According to Sturman (1997), a case study is a general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon, a comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis. A case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives, whose primary purpose is to generate a detailed understanding of a specific topic (Simons, 2009). Sagadin (1991) stated that a case study is used when we analyze and describe individual people, a group of people, individual institutions or a problem, process, phenomenon or event. As Yin (1994) observed, case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. In this study, it was seemingly impossible to separate periods of educational inopportunity from the societal context out of which successful Black males emerged.

Creswell (2013) views case study research as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple

bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes (Creswell, p. 97). Thus, case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). In other words, a researcher opts to do case study research because she wants to understand a real-world case and assumes that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the case (Yin & Davis, 2007). Types of qualitative cases are distinguished by the size of a bounded case, such as whether the case involves one individual, several individuals, a group or entire program, or an activity; they are also distinguished in terms of the intent of the case analysis (Creswell, p. 99). In this study, the researcher analyzed the impact of societal and institutional practices on Black males. This study can be best defined as a single instrumental case study. The intent of the case study is important as well. The intent of the case study was to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern and a case or cases selected to best understand the problem (Stake, 1995). The unique contribution of a case study approach is that it provides the researcher with a holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon within its social context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The focus, in this study, is the academic success of Black males from urban community settings. The bounded system is a single urban high school that implemented an after-school program designed to advance the academic success of Black males.

Merriam (1988) characterized case studies as being particularistic, descriptive and heuristic, and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources. Descriptive, in this sense, describes the end product as a thick description of the

phenomenon, which is the impact of institutional inopportunity on successful Black Males. According to Stake (1995, 2000, 2005), the aim of the case study is to understand, in a meaningful and nuanced way, the view of those within the case. Although a case study can be conducted from any theoretical grounding, Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011) suggested that Stake's perspective is closely aligned with an interpretive approach that emphasizes creating thick descriptions of social life from the viewpoints of participants to understand meaning from their perspectives. Thick description is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is a way of achieving a type of external validity. Describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Lincoln and Guba (2000) urged researchers to produce "thick descriptions" of cases so that they are able to *transfer* conclusions from one case to another based on fittingness. An additional purpose of thick, rich description, as identified by Creswell and Miller (2000), is to draw the reader more closely into the story or narrative to increase coherence and to evoke feelings for and a sense of connection with the participants in the study.

Qualitative researchers conducting thick, descriptive research are typically seeking what Clifford Geertz (1973) termed "thick descriptions" of social life from the perspective of those being studied. Researchers also provided very detailed descriptions of settings, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures as a way of making their accounts more credible – to show that they were diligent in their attempts to conduct thorough research (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Given the sensitive nature of the topic as well as the in-depth data that qualitative researchers are in pursuit of, the best way to gather

this kind of data is directly from the population of interest by conducting in-depth interviews or oral history interviews that will lead to "thick descriptions" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A case study design is appropriate as the focus of the study was to understand how African American males successfully managed periods of institutional inopportunity situated within the societal context of the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As this study is a secondary analysis of archival data, the original researcher gathered detailed data through interviews. The original study consisted of six interviews. This chapter will discuss data sources, data collection, and data analysis, all managed within a qualitative case study design.

Data Sources

Site selection. Yin (1984) proposed that the factors that dictate a single-case design also determine site selection. Site selection should be a well thought out process. Researchers may begin site selection by considering the nature of their topic (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987). Once the limiting factors are determined, specific sites may be identified and approached (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, p. 373).

The original study was conducted with graduates of Aim Academy High School, an urban mid-Western public school in the United States. At the time of the data collection, Aim reported a population of approximately 577 students, markedly lower than previous years. Furthermore, 94.8% of the student population identified as African American. This study used archival data in the form of previously collected semi-structured interviews. The primary researcher obtained a research agreement with a community service organization, Imani Student Development Corporation, to assist in identifying individuals

for the study. The Imani Student Development Corporation was founded in 1997 to link the education efforts of Aim Academy High School to the broader community and improve educational and personal outcomes for Aim's students. Imani's philosophy is based on restorative justice, social emotional learning, and college and career development.

Imani's program works with students year-round and cultivates an environment for staff members to foster meaningful relationships with mentees which is centered at the core of the overall mission. In the 2010-2011 school year, Imani provided support for over 8,000 students and 250 teachers at 9 inner-city midwestern public high schools (Hargrett, 2014). In addition to the services and supports provided, Imani offered before, during and after-school support to urban teenagers, encouraging their overall development of self-efficacy, resourcefulness and the motivation needed to accomplish their college and career-related goal. Since their partnership with Imani, the graduation rate at Aim High Academy increased by 21% from 1998 to 2010, and the college enrollment rate increased by 60% during those same years (Hargrett, p. 30). Recently, Imani has expanded its services citywide, and now serves 12 midwestern public high schools.

Imani has produced both high school and college graduates over the past two decades. They would like to better understand how to support their student's post-secondary matriculation. The partnership with Imani provides an authentic opportunity for the meaningful application of the research findings to redress African-American male underperformance. This study examined factors supporting matriculation measures in community college and four-year colleges/universities. One method of understanding the

academic transition from high school to college is by assessing how students perform on district or state level examinations. Most standardized exams measure knowledge of basic skills. The Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) was administered to participants, in this study, during their high school years.

The Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), was administered to (students in the state represented in this study) grade 11 public school students for the first time in spring 2001. It assessed the high school benchmarks as defined by the State Learning Standards. Student performance on the PSAE is evaluated on four levels: Exceeds Standards, Meets Standards, Below Standards, and Academic Warning. The PSAE once measured the achievement of grade 11 students in reading, mathematics, science, and writing. The final administration of PSAE occurred in spring 2014. The results in Table 1 and Table 2 reflect Reading, Math and Science data from the last PSAE, administered in 2014 on the school and district level.

Table 1: School Data (Aim Academy High School)

					TOTAL TESTED
Reading	24.7	65.9	9.4	0%	85
Math	50.6	42.5	6.9	0%	87
Science	39.1	57.5	3.4	0%	87
academic warning	below standards	meets standards	exceeds standards		

State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

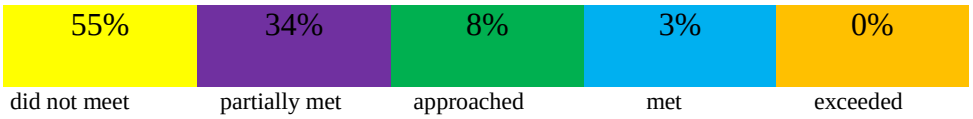
Table 2: District Data by Student Group

	academic warning	below standards	meets standards	exceeds standards	meets or exceeds	TOTAL TESTED
Reading	16.7	55.2	26.5	1.6	28.1	10,075
Math	25.2	53.1	21.0	0.6	21.6	10,083
Science	25.8	58.8	14.4	1.0	15.4	10,081

**For the purpose of this study, the "student group" represents African American students.*
State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

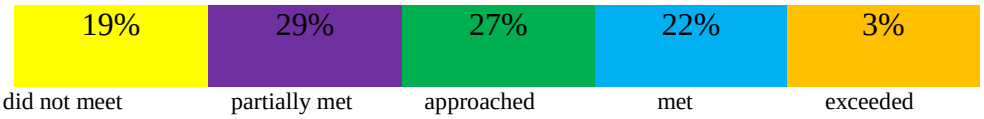
In spring 2015, state schools completed the first administration of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment in English Language Arts and Math. This assessment, administered to students in grades 3-12, is aligned to the state learning standards and is designed to assess students' mastery of key concepts, critical thinking, and writing skills. The PARCC assessment replaced the previously administered Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). Tables 3 - 7 outline the most recent 2015 PARCC assessment results, extracted from the State at A Glance Report Card (2014-2015). The school data is from Aim Career Academy High School, the inaugural site of the Imani School Development Program. The school data was used to add perspective to the overall dataset. The district data is taken from the school district that Aim Career Academy High School feeds into.

Table 3: School Data of Academic Success (Aim Career Academy High School)



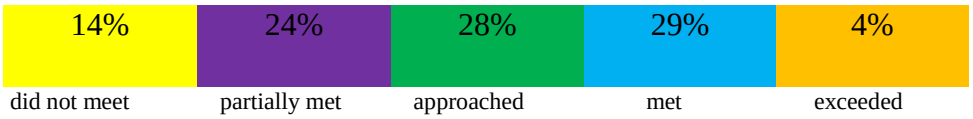
State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

Table 4: District Data of Academic Success



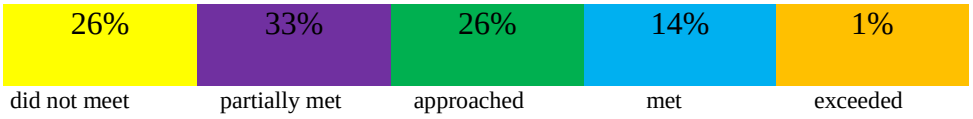
State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

Table 5: State Data



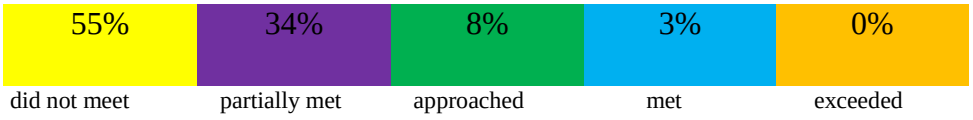
State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

Table 6: Success by Student Group



**For the purpose of this study, the "student group" represents African American students.*
State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

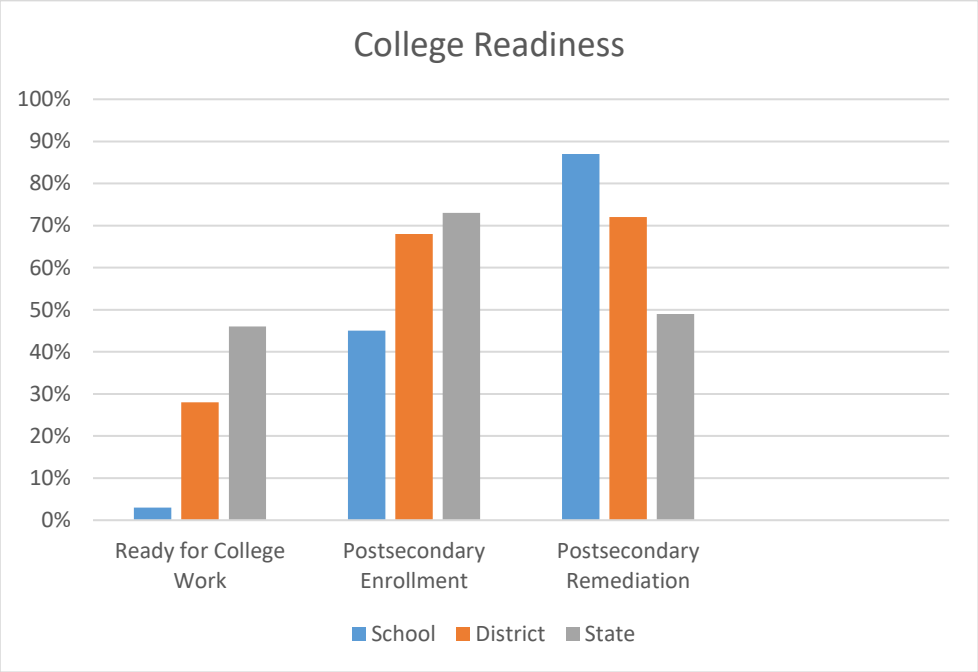
Table 7: Success by Student Group (Aim Career Academy High School) *



**For the purpose of this study, the "student group" represents African American students.*
State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

Figure 1 represents the most recent College Readiness data on a school (Aim Career Academy), district and state level.

Figure 1: College Readiness Chart



State At-A-Glance Report Card (2014-2015)

Ready for College Work: Students who meet or exceed ACT college readiness benchmarks.

Postsecondary Enrollment: Students who enroll at colleges or universities.

Postsecondary Remediation: *(lower is better)*: Students enrolled in State community colleges who require remedial coursework.

The data presented illuminated the fact that the majority of students on the school and district level scored below standard on the PSAE. Moreover, the data significantly showed that African Americans did not meet the standard on the PARCC assessment as well. It is from this educational context that the six participants were found.

Data collection. Researchers must consider the research methods, data collection methods, that will be used, as well as their role in the case study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Case study always necessitates the use of multiple methods and data sources (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, p. 265). The data used in this study was previously collected in the form of initial and follow-up interviews from the criterion sample of participants, as described in the next section. In addition to utilizing previously collected data, the researcher used the most recent Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) and Partnership Assessment for the Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) data from the site of the primary study.

Interviews were semi-structured, audio-taped, and stored securely. The most common data collection method in qualitative research are interviews (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews rely on a certain set of questions and try to guide the conversation to remain, more loosely, on those questions; at the same time, they allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The interviewer has the liberty to add or subtract questions as necessary throughout the interview (Hays & Singh, 2012). Although the interview usually will be structured by the issues of the researcher (etic issues), it is sometimes better to ask an open question, letting the interviewees comment or tell stories (structuring them around their own emic issues) (Stake, 2010). Hays and Singh (2012) contended that the primary benefits of semi-structured interviews include the ability for the participant's voice to provide a richer picture of the issue being investigated. I used transcripts that were previously collected, stored and secured,

provided by the primary researcher. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Interview transcripts are the only form of archival data used for this study. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym as a measure of protective identity and privacy.

Criterion sample. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest and for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2013). Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding (Patton, 2015). Although there are several different purposeful sampling strategies, criterion sampling appears to be used most commonly in qualitative research (Palinkas, et. al, p. 533). Criterion sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study and yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, p. 264). Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001). For this study, the criterion included African American male college graduates, who are also alumni of Imani Student Development Corporation (Hargrett, 2014). The primary researcher asked the gatekeepers at the Imani Student Development Corporation to assist with identifying African American male college graduate alumni of the Imani program (Hargrett, p. 34). The alumni who met the original criteria subsequently met the present study's description.

Participants. The participants in this study ranged from ages 23 – 28 years of age. Table 8 outlines relevant demographic data about each participant. All participants received either 2-year or 4-year degrees from accredited universities and colleges, respectively. One participant has progressed further and received his Master's degree and one is currently pursuing his Master's degree. Among the other factors represented in the chart, it is important to consider the birth order of the individuals and whether or not each Black male was raised by 1 or 2 parents. This information provides the reader with a clearer context on the possible responsibilities this set of participants had to endure in society.

Table 8: Demographic Information of African American Males

Name	*Aquil*	*Faris*	*Jamael*	*James*	*Jibril*	*Kehlin*	*Khalil*
Age	24	28	27	25	23	25	23
College	Dennison College	Ohio State Un.	Tuskegee & Auburn	Southern Illinois University	University of Illinois	Malcolm X College	University of Illinois
Major	History	Political Science	Education	Criminal Justice	Engineering	I.T.	Business
Degree	B.A.	B.A.	M.A.	B.A.	B.S.	A.A.	B.A.
Year Grad.	2012	2008	2012	2013	2014	2013	2014
H.S. Year	2008	2003	2005	2007	2009	2007	2009
Marital Status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Parental Status #	None	None	None	None	None	Two	None
Siblings	4	4	11	4	2	2	2
Birth Order	Second Oldest	Oldest	Second oldest	Second Oldest	Oldest	Second	Second
1 or 2 Parents	1 parent Home	1 parent Home	2 parent home	2 parent Home	2 parent Home	1parent	1 Parent
Current Job	Grad Student	Loan Officer	Counselor	None Currently	Recent Grad	Student	None Current
Salary Range	15,000-25,000	36,000-50,000	51,000-70,000	None Currently	None Currently	15,000 25,000	None Current

Data Analysis

A secondary analysis using a previously collected dataset was conducted. Conducting a secondary analysis of the data set means the researcher was not directly involved with the original collection of data. Secondary analysis of qualitative data is the use of existing data to find answers to research questions that differ from the questions asked in the original research (Hinds, Vogel, & Clarke-Steffen, 1997). While both studies sought to study the academic achievement of African-American males, the first researcher heavily explored success through the lens of resilience measures and challenges in both home and collegiate environments. My research placed an emphasis on the benefit of and access to social networks and social capital for eventual goal fulfillment. Moreover, the in- and out of class college experiences were extracted from the narratives to typify how these opportunities benefitted the successful completion of college for African-American males.

Authors have applied secondary analysis to data when they have wanted to pursue interests distinct to those of the original analysis (Hinds, Vogel, & Clarke-Steffen, 1997), to perform additional analysis of an original dataset or additional analysis of a sub-set of the original dataset (Hinds et al., p. 416; Heaton 2008), to apply a new perspective or a new conceptual focus to the original research issues (Heaton, p. 38), to describe the contemporary and historical attributes and behavior of individuals, societies, groups or organizations (Corti and Thompson, 1995), or to provide case material for teaching and methodological development (Corti and Thompson, 1998). Qualitative secondary analysis entails the use of already produced data to develop new social scientific and/or

methodological understandings (Irwin, 2013). As a secondary analyst, my goal was to avidly study and stay in tune with the primary research data, understand the overall and unique purpose of the original study, the details centered around the data collection process, and other ways in which the sample was structured.

The aim of qualitative research is to portray the reality of the area under investigation, and to enhance the understanding of the situation and the meanings and values attributed to this by individuals (Rose, 1994). The data was analyzed using the constant comparative analysis method. The constant comparative analysis method is a way of analyzing qualitative data where the information gathered is coded into emergent themes or codes (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). The researcher continually revisits the data after the initial coding, until it is clear that no new themes are emerging (Hewitt-Taylor, p. 39). All qualitative data analysis methods involve coding data into themes, then categories to form the conclusion (Jasper, 1994). All notes from the analysis of the original documents were coded.

The transcribed interviews were uploaded into the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose (2017). Researchers are able to organize data using Dedoose. Coding and analyzing was done in Dedoose, as performed by the researcher, not the software program. The program does not conduct analysis or coding. The Dedoose platform allows you to organize and view digital data in different charts and formats.

A focused coding procedure allows for the building and clarifying of concepts: a researcher examines all the data in a category, compares each piece of data with every other piece, and finally builds a clear working definition of each concept which is then

named (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The researcher uploaded 7 transcripts into the Dedoose database. It is important to note that sample size is not the key issue in qualitative research. This is because the general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon, rather than to represent populations as in quantitative research (Gentles, Charles, Phloeg, & McKibbon, 2015).

Once the media files (transcripts) were uploaded, descriptors were assigned to each transcript as a means of proper identification. The descriptors allowed the researcher to efficiently organize the data. Then, the researcher read each document and identified excerpts in each document. The researcher extracted 224 excerpts from the data analysis. These excerpts, consisting of sentences, paragraphs or sections were assigned a code. These codes represented the initial or "child codes" associated with the data. The codes were not predetermined, but generated from the original data. Although literature based codes can provide a useful tool, they can impede the development of new ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After coding the first transcript, each subsequent reading was carried out in this fashion and new codes were added as deemed necessary. During the coding process, notes were taken about how decisions were reached and how the process was conducted. This process is called memoing. After coding was completed, the codes with common elements were merged to form categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). After the researcher coded all interviews, the excerpts were condensed into 57 initial or child codes. The quality of data analysis depends on repeated, systematic searching of the data (Hammersley, 1981). Repeat coding was performed to review interpretations, in the light

of new data gathered and as new codes were generated, until no new insights were gleaned (Riley, 1990).

The elements of categorizing were used to analyze the data. Categorization can be accomplished most efficiently when categories are identified in such a way that "they are internally as homogenous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The data was examined, deconstructed, compared, and categorized. This was done electronically by creating files for each category containing copies of the codes that were merged to form the categories. In this digitized method, using Dedoose, the researcher read each unit and noted the content. The second unit was read, its contents were noted, and compared to the first unit. The second unit was then placed in the category as the first unit or assigned its category based on similarity. The researcher searched for broad themes within the individual narrative data sets and reexamined the data for overlapping themes. The data was then reduced into themes through the coding process. Four themes or parent codes resulted after the process was conducted. The four emerging themes or parent codes were linked, further creating the Ecology of Hope Model outlined in Chapter 4.

The categories derived from the data collection method were clustered around each research question they contributed to answering (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Thereafter, the data was represented in the study through tables, charts, and discussion. All charts in Dedoose were linked to the primary data.

Table 9 represents a codebook that was developed to guide the content analysis of this qualitative study. It represents a complete record of data collected from the analysis process. After the complete data analysis process, 57 child codes were created, and a subsequent 4 parent codes were identified as a result of constant comparative analysis.

Table 9: Codebook

	Transcript #1	Transcript #2	Transcript #3	Transcript #4	Transcript #5	Transcript #6	Transcript #7
Number of Pages	17 pages	11 pages	20 pages	11 pages	23 pages	9 pages	8 pages
Number of Words	59,668	30,482	55,202	40,775	71,153	23,220	19,724
Number of Excerpts	64	22	43	41	29	14	11

Child Codes
-initial codes identified after extracting excerpts
Total of 57 child codes represented across transcripts
Parent Codes (Themes)
-broader, emerging codes identified through constant comparative analysis
Total of 4 parent codes represented across transcripts

Trustworthiness. In the 1980s, Guba and Lincoln transformed the nature of qualitative inquiry by developing criteria to ensure rigor (which they termed trustworthiness) during qualitative inquiry, to evaluate the credibility, transferability, dependability, and the trustworthiness of the completed product (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1989) presented the following definitions:

- Transferability (external validity, or generalizability): Thick description is essential to transfer the original findings to another context, or individuals (Guba and Lincoln, p. 241)

- Dependability (i.e., reliability): Attainable through credibility, the use of overlapping methods (triangulation), stepwise replication (splitting data and duplicating the analysis), and use of an inquiry audit or audit trail (Guba and Lincoln, p. 242)
- Reliability: dependability, consistency, and/or repeatability of a project's data collection, interpretation, and/or analysis (Miller, 2008). Basically, it is the ability to obtain the same results if the study were to be repeated (Guba and Lincoln, p. 242)

Qualitative inquirers mindfully employ a variety of techniques to increase the trustworthiness of the research they conduct; that is, how much trust can be given that the researcher did everything possible to ensure that data was appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported (Carlson, 2010). Among the most often used procedures to increase trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry are audit trails, reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000), thick and rich description, triangulation, and member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1998). The present study used triangulation to enhance credibility.

Triangulation. Triangulated approaches are generally used as they build validity into the case study. By adopting a triangulated approach, researchers are using multiple techniques to clarify meaning (Stake, 2005). Triangulation is using two (or more) different methods to get at the same research question and looking for convergence in research findings (Greene, 2007; Greene, Carcelli, & Graham, 1989). Another definition described triangulation as the procedure by which qualitative researchers seek clarity through the

use of multiple data sources and pursuing the diversity of perception, even the multiple realities within which people live (Stake, p. 123). In an effort to check the validity of the current research findings, the researcher employed the method of data triangulation. The triangulation method is used by qualitative researchers to further establish validity in their studies and examine a research question from various perspectives. Triangulation is using additional data to check or expand one's interpretations (Stake, 2010). Merriam (2009) asserted that triangulation can be accomplished through multiple ways. The present study relied on comparisons across graduation strati and type of college attended, and staff and student in general comparisons (Hargrett, 2014). I particularly analyzed the semi-structured and audio taped interviews as they served as the researcher's different data sources. During the analysis stage, transcripts from the stakeholder groups were compared to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence (Hargrett, p. 36). Hays and Singh (2012) find triangulation of data collection methods appropriate when the different methods yield data that would not be obtained by using solely one method.

In qualitative inquiry, validity and reliability are often intertwined with reliability attainment inherently integrated as processes of verification in the attainment of validity, hence, agreeing with Guba (1981) that validity may be supported internally by reliability (Morse, 2015). The aforementioned criteria for trustworthiness was employed to explore how the findings can transfer to other academically successful Black males in an effort to heighten overall awareness of protective measures and impact the field of culturally responsive educational practices. Moreover, triangulation was used to achieve dependability and reliability.

Thick Description and Transferability. Transferability is the qualitative study's form of reliability and generalizability. Lincoln and Guba (2000) urge researchers to produce "thick descriptions" of cases to be able to transfer conclusions from one case to another based on fittingness. Thick description refers to a description of the setting and participants in the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from raw interview data (Merriam, 2009). Thick description enables readers to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations (Shenton, 2004). To allow transferability the researcher provided sufficient detail of the context of the study for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting (Shenton, p. 63). As transferability is judged by the amount of details about participants in a study, the thick description, as further detailed in Chapter 4, will allow for transferability and comparisons to individuals and other sites with similar descriptors. Therefore, this study speaks to urban educated, African American male college graduates, across contexts.

Positionality

Qualitative research is an activity that focuses on the positionality of the researcher within the context of the world. Positionality is defined as the social location of the researcher and participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Merriam (2009) defined positionality as a reflection on the researcher's own views, assumptions, and biases. The method relies on disclosures of position that play in the decision-making process of human subject

research (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The need for such a method is based on the assumption that social, cultural, and political dynamics exist between a researcher and his or her subject (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These dynamics are based on factors such as education, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and disability (Mickelson, 2003). Historically, people of color have been misrepresented, exploited, silenced, and taken for granted in education research (Dillard, 2000; Stanfield, 1995). As a researcher, it is important to understand the significant role that racialized and cultural positionality have on the study. My personal story allows me to be instrumental in adding to this body of research.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world prompting qualitative researchers to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In conducting research, it is critical to be mindful of the fact that conducting a study that highlights issues of differences may contribute to the further marginalization of the participants of the study (hooks, 1990). Qualitative research seeks to provide an understanding of the problem through the experiences of individuals, and the particular details of their lived experiences (Bourke, 2014).

The present study used archival data, which means the current researcher wasn't present when the original data was collected. Some ethical issues associated with conducting secondary analysis of data relate to the possibility of effective interpretation and analysis of data by those who come from a distance, uninvolved in the process of data creation (Irwin, 2013). Another particular concern relates to a notion that archived data might be treated as foundational, neutral and effectively cleansed of the contextual,

conceptual and interactional contexts in which they were produced and through which they should be understood (Mauthner and Doucet, 2008). When the researcher isn't present with the original data collection process, this can potentially pose a challenge for secondary analysts. However, Irwin (p. 297), proposed the following as a means of optimizing this form of analysis:

- Secondary analysts need to understand the research objectives, design and the research questions and methods used for data generation (including interview schedules or other data elicitation tools)
- Secondary analysts need a grasp of the sample, including knowledge of the sampling decisions and how they related to the research questions, whether the desired sample was achieved and how it related to a wider population and/or to theory
- Secondary analysts need to understand any implicit as well as planned ways in which the sample was structured

As suggested by Hays and Singh (2012), the researcher journaled about issues of positionality during the process to reflect on her positionality as a researcher analyzing archival data.

Personal story. As a mother of two African American young men, Black male achievement has been at the forefront of my thinking for many years. I grew up with a mother as an educator and observed the fond relationships she shared with her students. She was well connected to both her school and local community. She has always been generous with her wisdom, time, and energy. Her students and children in the community

knew she genuinely cared about them and their future success. My mother modeled an excellent example of the multi-faceted role educators must play in the lives of their students. There are several layers, and it requires massive amounts of patience, understanding and adjusting. She is the reason I became an educator.

At an early age, I always thought of the school as a safe retreat, a place where teachers had your best interest and were devoted to your success. To a degree, this notion is still true, in some instances. As a child, you view experiences through a lens of innocence and often times are unaware or unconsciously filter out discriminatory practices within the school setting. I was grateful to have educators who were invested in my overall well-being and academic success. I cannot recall any teacher, during my formative schooling, who didn't care about my future. Essentially, they played their part and lived up to my expectations of educators. As an adult, I understand that being a female scholar played a major part in the way teachers responded to me and other female peers. Girls are generally able to skillfully remain "under the radar" as most, by nature, tend to be more conforming and compliant than male students.

I am the fifth of six children, which gave me the opportunity to witness several examples of varied schooling experiences growing up. The educational experience of one of my brothers, however, is the one I remember most. Considering the level of input, patience and tolerance I was provided as a young, female student, this same level of patience and understanding was not always at the avail for most African-American male students. My earliest memory of being aware of my brother's bouts with institutional inopportunity leads me back to our high school years. Back then, he was quite the character

and was seemingly reactionary in his response to educators. He was never a disrespectful student, he merely lived in a world where he felt his voice should be heard as it should. Where I would once think of it as "misbehavior", I now know that it was his struggle to be resilient and cope in an environment where teacher expectations for African American boys wasn't particularly high. For some reason, I believe he inherently knew this as well.

My brother, sister and I did not attend our neighborhood high school and were bussed to a magnet program for communications. This idea, alone, gave the magnet administrators and teachers at the school something to "hold over student's heads" if they didn't meet expectations. They were swift in their attempts to transfer anyone back to their home school if they weren't doing the right thing. My brother struggled with his relationship with the teacher who taught media technology. She was a veteran in the field and held no reservations boasting her accolades. I remember her being the type of educator who engaged in loud, verbal altercations with students with an end goal of being victorious. In other words, she "pushed around her weight" and put students in vulnerable situations, especially African American boys. My brother was one of the students, who she not only verbally battled with, but who would not allow her to overshadow, humiliate, or demean him. He was disinterested in her attempts to emasculate and berate him in the presence of his peers. This alone, for an African American male, can incite unpleasant and at times, disruptive behavior. However, for some reason she couldn't see past her desire to "win" in the end, so she continued to aggravate the situation. My brother was relentless as he fought to the end. As a result, she eventually called for his removal from the program. Now, this isn't to say that he could not have done things differently or chosen another

alternative with his interactions with her, but, as an adult, she could have as well. It was clear that she didn't wholeheartedly value the young African American males she taught. She didn't think much of them, gave them a hard time, and fell short of creating an environment where they could thrive and feel successful.

My mother fought for him to stay in the program, and I have a vivid memory of her advising the teacher and administrators of their unjust behavior. In her words to them, "Y'all are not going to railroad my son." Back then I didn't quite understand the intensity of that statement and found it to be comical. Now, I know exactly what she meant as she stood by her African-American son and didn't allow agents of the public school system to destroy his character. She was fully aware of what was going on and refused to be silent about it. My mother never, and still doesn't, turn a deaf ear to immoral and unethical practices. This is just one example of how discriminatory practices are born in the very schools that some of view as a safe haven for our children. Unfortunately, institutions of education are some of the primary breeding grounds for discrimination, segregation, ill-informed practices, and deficit thinking.

Fast forward seventeen years and I'm sitting at a table with a group of educators, prepared to conference with them about my oldest son. At this point, he was an eleven-year old, sixth grade student. He was experiencing challenges with transitioning into middle school. He was unorganized, struggled to keep up with the demands of eight classes and on some level, socially awkward. But, he was eleven, and most, if not all of this, was developmental. He attended a predominantly White middle school in Houston, Texas. Many families sought out this school because of its record of academic excellence.

Apparently, my family should have been grateful for the opportunity. As the meeting opened, I greeted the teachers and thanked them for taking the time to meet as a team. I shared some background on my son as well as expressed my concern for his progress moving forward. Then, the floor was open for the teachers to comment. Every single teacher sitting at the roundtable opened up with a negative statement about my son, their student. It ranged from him being "all over the place" to him "talking in class" to him "not keeping up". As I listened, I struggled as I fought back tears listening to this group of insensitive middle school educators. These were teachers who were familiar with the developmental stages of middle schoolers as they were not novice educators. I, too, was an educator and found it hard to believe what I was experiencing in that moment. After they finished their statements, I posed the question, "Does anyone have anything positive to say about my child?" All faces reddened and went blank with embarrassment. I heard a few murmurs and stutters as a few of them attempted to offer rebuttals and add a positive note to the conversation. The magnet coordinator tried to clean it up and offer kind words as it related to her interactions with my son. By then, it was too late, and the damage was done. They had shown their hands, and I was clear on what I was dealing with, a group of culturally insensitive teachers who had no desire to help my son bridge the gap from elementary to middle school. It was that blaring reality that reminded me that I had to be the first (and sometimes only) advocate for my African American son. I had to call out educator's deficit-based thinking and discriminatory practices and be the voice for my other children. It was then that the picture was made abundantly clear; African American

boys are constantly marginalized and critiqued even when their behaviors are strikingly similar, if not identical, to their White male peers.

When I research Black male success, I am not reading about statistics of young men who I am unfamiliar with. When I read the counternarratives of Black males who experienced institutional inopportunity, but were resilient and managed to persist, I am reading the life stories of my brothers, sons, and nephews. Many of their experiences, across this country, are mirror images. Although my boys are now 19 and 21, I am still a beacon of light for them, an understanding force, a source of guidance. They look to me for answers even when they don't always have the questions. Studying Black males and what they experience as byproducts of the United States educational system, helps me understand how Black males internalize and manage a system that was never designed for them to succeed. It helps me understand the multilayered struggle. This research is for us all, parents, family members, loved ones, and educators. We must be aware. We cannot ignore what Black males are experiencing in these schools. We must do the right thing, even when no one is watching. It is my hope that this study enlightens many to truth about Black male success and motivates Black males to continue the fight, intelligently.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

African-Americans have a longstanding history of consciously seeking ways to improve the family structure. The compounding challenges of an inherent system of fundamental imbalance across race codes has left the African American family no other choice but to turn obstacles into opportunities. These systemic obstacles, often times subliminal to the target group, create the void that every Black male must experience. African American families have shared expectations of success for its members. To actualize the full potential of the family unit, there must be a synchronized relationship amongst family members as they interact with the physical environment. The physical environment and its interrelated components impact the daily lives of Black males. This robust impact serves as a catapult of success for Black males striving towards excellence. In the present study, the voices and experiences of seven academically successful African-American males are featured. These men all attended the same urban high school in a mid-western U.S. city. Similarly, they all persevered through like experiences of environmental adversity, inopportunity and other life challenges. While these Black men represented a population that is routinely ignored and significantly marginalized, their stories embody greatness. The interview data suggests that all participants in the study held shared beliefs about what it takes to become an academically successful African-American male. Their stories characterize a beacon of hope for reimagining a language that speaks to Black male success.

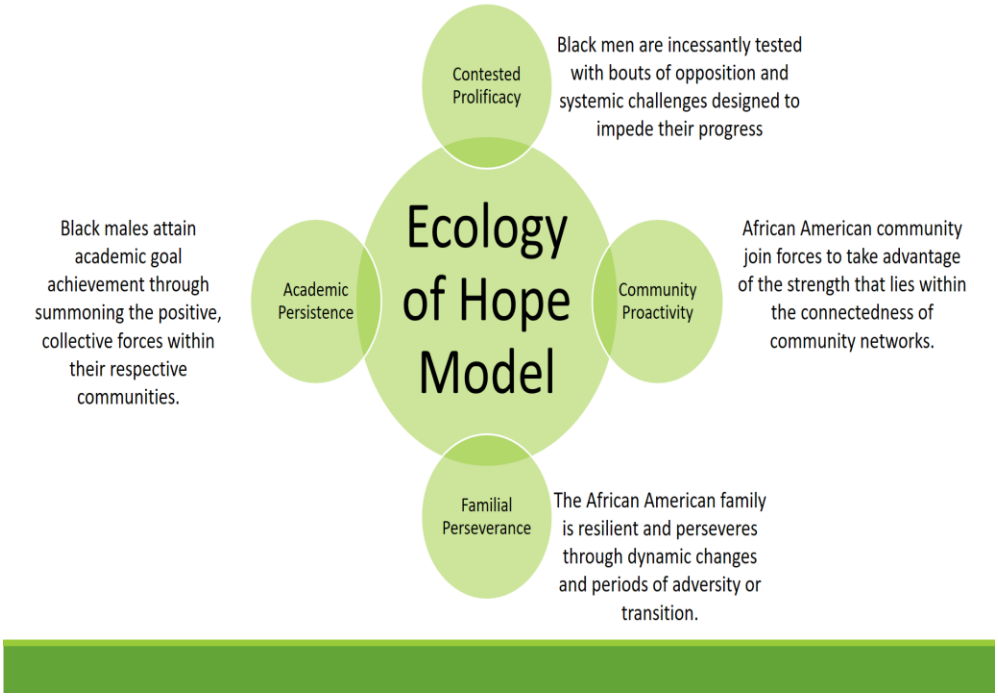
The Ecology of Hope Model offers an avenue to consider the relationship between African American males and their physical environment (society). This model represents the integral components of the social system where these young men find hope. Essentially, the Ecology of Hope Model is an application of several theories, particularly Critical Race Theory, Black Maleness, Racial Socialization and the Resilience Model. This model investigates the processes by which Black men achieve and maintain a sense of social balance and equilibrium. Additionally, it provides the means to reconceptualize the research surrounding Black male achievement through counternarratives. The permanence of race and racism, the ability of Black males to traverse societal inopportunity, and the lived experiences and developmental processes that successful Black males endure are all representations of the Ecology of Hope Model.

The Ecology of Hope Model draws away from the highly Eurocentric resilience framework, which is a passive portrayal of the Black community. Instead, it challenges what we say we understand about resilience and provides an intimate understanding of how the participants in this study summoned the positive, collective forces within their respective Black communities. It is a culturally appropriate advancement away from traditional resilience research and helps to redefine the language of the resilience theory.

The Ecology of Hope Model is a combination of interconnected social systems. It is within these social systems where the participants in this study find hope. The model has four major concepts that Black men can reorganize themselves around. The major concepts, which represent the themes, are contested prolificacy, community proactivity, familial perseverance, and academic persistence.

Embedded in the Ecology of Hope Model is an inherited language code relative to individual and group experiences that awakens the conscience. This level of awareness energizes and promotes the development of human potential toward a productive outcome. The four main themes of this model all work together to contest what we have learned about traditional resilience research. The themes represent the central areas in which the participants in the study negotiated the challenges they encountered as they persisted to academic success. The results of the present study expand the definition of resilience. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the Ecology of Hope Model.

Figure 2: Ecology of Hope Model



The research design of a case study will inform the organization of findings and analyses in this chapter. The findings will be presented as they correlate with the overarching question and four guiding research questions, all formed as a result of inductive analysis:

Overarching Question: How can the voices of college educated Black males inform efforts to promote success among Black males educated in urban environments?

1. How did Black males leverage the various resources within their social networks to develop an achievement persona and persist academically?
2. How did Black males negotiate social networks within Black communities?
3. How did Black males benefit from social networks within Black communities?
4. How did out of class learning experiences contribute to the academic success of Black males in college?

The forthcoming chapter will be divided into four sections, addressing the four major themes that make up the Ecology of Hope Model. For each theme, the participants will be treated as individual, embedded cases. The child codes will be included under each theme and matched with participants who offered dialogue as related to those codes. Analyses and findings, as drawn from the collection of data within, each case, will be included under each subheading.

Contested Prolificacy

Findings in this section answer the research question: How did Black males negotiate social networks within Black communities? Throughout the multidimensional, steady changing reality of the Black male experience, Black men must maintain high

levels of resilience as they conquer life's challenges to achieve excellence. The stages Black men undergo are ultimately a pathway to self-actualized behaviors. It is important to remember, however, that throughout these stages, Black men are incessantly tested with bouts of opposition and systemic challenges designed to impede their progress. This concept is defined as the contested prolificacy stage of Black male academic progress. Contested prolificacy is the first theme of the Ecology of Hope Model. Contested prolificacy states that Black men, on a grand scale, will be constantly tested and met with deliberate attempts to obstruct their growth and advancement.

Career experiences. The participants describe experiences that shaped their careers.

Jamael appreciates the support he received from co-workers:

> In my profession, I have a couple of counselors who were once supervisors in the field and, over time, they became co-workers. So, my co-workers in my department are some of the ones who changed the game for me. They let me know the realities of being an effective school counselor. They encouraged me to be an advocate for students who need as much help as they can get.

James explains the "tougher rules" that have to be followed by African-Americans in the professional arena:

> I think we have a tougher rule as African-Americans. I notice that we have certain expectations. Like, I have to live a double-life. I have to be able to maintain my Blackness while trying to succeed in corporate America. I have to do this especially with people in the Black community. It's like walking a fine line

between White America and Black America. So, I end up in situations where I'm either being too Black or not Black enough. So, I'm always trying to keep a balance.

Life trials. All participants, on different levels, describe trials they had to endure in life. One participant's trials directly affected his desire to do better.

Kehlin explains how his trials in life affected his future decision making:

> Once, I was working at a bank when I was about 16 years old. I ended up getting arrested for some stuff I was doing with accounts. I was very young, and I made a big mistake with that. But, when that happened to me, it gave me a life check. It checked me like you need to do what you got to do. By the grace of God, it got thrown out of court. It gave me a second opportunity to rethink things and do certain things right and look before I leaped.
>
> I ended up going into the military when I graduated from high school. It gave me a whole new mindset on life once I experienced going through basic training and advanced individual training. I was so used to being on the west side of my city and things being a certain way that when I joined the military, everything was different. It was a life change, but it was a good life change. It put me more on track as far as where I needed to be. I was concentrating more on having self-discipline and doing the things I needed to do to accomplish my goals.

Measurement of achievement. Participants give their thoughts related to whether they have achieved excellence. Their perceptions on achieving excellence take on varied perspectives.

Aquil considers himself to still be on the path to achieving excellence:

> I don't consider myself having succeeded yet or having made it because I still see myself as a work in progress. I'm still constantly moving towards my dreams and I think if I acknowledge that I've made it or succeeded, I will somehow lose the vigor of attempting to reach my goals. I don't consider moving to one plateau to be a major success. I have issues with the word success because it notates finality to me, something that is complete. It means I am finished and I don't have to hustle or move forward with my grind.

Faris explains how his progress, thus far, is a measurement of achieving excellence:

> It's a slow yes in that all things considered, I have a pretty decent life. I don't have to worry about the things I had to worry about in high school or as a kid. I can feed myself. I can come and go when I want to. I have certain freedoms that I wouldn't have if I would have chosen a life like others I grew up with.

Jamael measures his level of achievement in terms of beating the odds:

> If I were an outsider looking in, I definitely wouldn't believe some African American boy from a big family on my side of town would basically have even thought about leaving the city to go get a formal education. And then, to add to that, not only did he do that, but he was the only person in his whole family to get a degree. Now that's something I wouldn't have expected. Now, I definitely feel successful in the sense that there were not a lot of opportunities afforded to me. I didn't take those opportunities for granted, I always took advantage of them. So, no, I'm not successful yet, but it's going to happen very soon. I do believe that.

James finds himself to be successful, but hasn't met his personal goals of achieving excellence:

> I don't think I've achieved excellence. I think that I will achieve excellence by ultimately completing all of my goals. That's how I look at my particular success. I'm successful, but I don't think I've achieved the ultimate level of excellence that I deem I am able to achieve. So, I'm currently on the road to achieving excellence.

Racial profiling. Racial discrimination and profiling is very prevalent in urban communities. Even as professionals, Black males continue to be contested throughout their lives. Aquil explains how this type of profiling is not limited to his community, but other communities as well:

> Here in my city, I get followed by the police even though I'm dressed like a professional.
>
> I get stopped by the police even when I have a book bag. They ask me crazy questions in my own community and when I'm in other communities. So, I guess by living in this particular city being a Black male in general is not easy. It's very difficult because you're always looked at as being a criminal. One situation happened last summer. I would get up at 5:00 in the morning and go running, you know just for exercise. I would run in my own community. On my first day running, I had on my headphones, so I wasn't aware that there was a police car detailing me. They were following me until I heard loud sirens in the back. They pulled me over because they thought I was running from a crime scene. When I told them I was running for exercise, they were kind of shocked. And, so, it's things

like that I go through. For me, my view of the police has not been a pleasant one. It's not from any bad experiences, but from actions like I just described.

Self-efficacy. Believing in yourself and your ability to succeed plays a major role in how tasks or challenges are approached. The Black males in this study understand that their success is tied to their actions and ultimate belief that they can succeed.

Aquil explains his rationale for making the right choices in society:

> I'm going to do this because not only is it the right choice because society says it's the right choice, but this is the right choice for me personally. This is what I want to do and I'm not doing this for my grandmother, father, or my community. At the end of the day, I'm doing this for me.

Even through significant social and academic stressors, Faris was committed to his personal success:

> I think the most important thing for me was that I still believed in myself regardless of all those distractors or social issues. I never saw myself as a part of that. Like, I grew up around these issues, but I didn't let them define who I was or what I did.

James describes himself as resilient in the face of adversity. He explains how certain stigmas shape the way people view African-Americans in general. This type of behavior serves as a source of motivation for him.

> I'm more so resilient when people tell me what I can't do or say things like, "Oh, you're smart to come from that neighborhood" or "You're not a typical Black person". So, those stigmas always motivated me because I always saw myself and see us as much more than what people deem us to be. This helps me transform into

> my best self and work towards continuing to move our culture forward as African-American males. I view myself as one of the leaders. In doing so, I try to hold myself to a high standard with everything that I do. I know when people see me, they not only see me, they see all African American males. So, when I operate on my own, I'm doing it for African American males in gene

Resilience as an African-American. The participants describe being resilient as African-Americans.

Aquil encountered moments where he had to navigate the trials of being an African-American male at a predominately White institution. He recalls his first experiences in college with White peers:

> When I went off to college, as a Black male, I went through a phase where I had to remind myself that I could do this. The culture shock was an immediate, visceral feeling. It's right there in your face as soon as you step on campus. I went through a stage of rediscovering myself. At first, I began to accept and embrace the difference in people, and then I stopped doing that when I discovered what I was doing. I realized I was attempting to engage with my peers from a surface level understanding and not seeking cultural understanding. When I became jaded by that process, I reverted back to this militant stage when I didn't do too much engage with my White classmates. I stayed in the Black Student Union. After becoming a Black Studies major, I began to look and understand the issues within the Black community. I understood the depth of them, the origin, and the history behind them. I began to soften and look at the complexities of race relations in American.

> I began to place myself on the spectrum. So, my views were still African centered, but I was more accepting of White participation.
>
> I always felt I had to combat this notion of a stereotype of being an angry Black person all the time. I had to be cognizant of my speech. When speaking in front of White classmates, it was dreadful because I had to make sure my tone was at a certain level and the words were not too hostile for them. Being politically correct was something I had to deal with. But, as I matriculated through college, I began to own the environment. The political correctness started to leave, and I would say I began to strike a balance. It was a balance between me telling it like it is and not hurting people's feelings.

Jamael explains having to deal with racial slurs:

> You will hear somebody blatantly call you the "N" word and it's not just African-Americans who call you that. So, when you know that, and you have to deal with that kind of stuff, you have to expect the best, but prepare yourself for the worst. That's the only way you can stay out of trouble, which is where I am now.

For James, African-Americans are resilient by nature:

> I think as an African-American that's part of our nature – survival. You can put any one of us in any instance and we'll find a way to survive. I think that's ultimately a good and a bad thing, a double-edged sword.

Resilience in the home. The participants revealed their individual levels of resilience as they adapted to adversity in their home environments.

Faris describes how certain challenges in his home environment affected his schooling:

> I would say I had to be resilient at home as I had a lot of difficulties. While I was in school, there were certain points when we didn't have lights or gas. When I was in college, it was difficult knowing my mom had housing issues and I had no way of assisting her.

James's father was in and out of jail and he had to serve as protector for this family. He describes his role as protector:

> Once I became 12 years old, my mom was the primary leader of the household. I became less of a son and I saw myself as more of having to protect my mom. Like, I had to do things in order to make sure my family was taken care of. So, I had to grow up a lot earlier.

James describes how being "poor" was not a part of his mental processing, another layer of resilience.

> So, at home, it wasn't really many troubles that I had. Growing up where I grew up, we really didn't know we were poor. My mother and father did a great job of just providing us with what we needed. When I look back on things, I realize we were very, very poor. But, our basic needs were being met, unlike some others growing up in the projects where I lived.

Khalil recalls a time when the family home was broken into and how it prompted him to want to relocate:

> When I lived out south, some people broke into our home. That's the only thing that made me think I really wanted to get out of the hood and do good for my family. That's about the only real situation that put me down a little bit. But, it also

> motivated me. Like, I don't want to live in this crap anymore. Let me go to school, do good for myself so I can do good for my family. Then, we will never have to possibly go through something like this again.

Resilience in the community. The participants revealed their individual levels of resilience as they adapted to adversity in their communities.

Aquil explains his will to do the right thing, within his community, despite the effort it took:

> But to do something that is right and to maintain a standard for yourself, whether it be morals or anything else, it takes practice and time. But, for me, I knew what my goals were. I knew that I didn't want to be like everyone else on the streets. And, so, I knew my actions had to reflect something different than the social norm of where I grew up.

James managed to dodge gangs in his community in his pursuit of excellence:

> I happened to dodge the problems associated with gangs and the stigma of what a Black male is. From my point of view, when you talk about poverty and gangs in the community, I avoided them so that I could achieve excellence.

Jibril discusses his level of mindfulness as it relates to the friends he chose in the community:

> As far as just fighting people and stuff like that, I didn't surround myself with a lot of people who were hot heads. Of course, I was around friends that fought, but they didn't just fight people for no reason. I knew stuff like that wasn't right,

> so I watched who I surrounded myself with and that helped keep me safe in the community.

Khalil credits his intuitive spirit to his level of resilience in his community. Although burdened by the current state of the community he grew up in, he uses it as motivation to do better in life:

> I think the reason I was able to detour away from a lot of the violence that occurred in my lifetime and even when I was in school was because I knew what I wanted. I had a drive. I saw things before they happened. I learned from others, you know, versus going through everything that people actually go through to learn.
>
> When I visit the area where I once lived, I use that as motivation. When I went off to school and continued to come back over the years, no improvements had been made. I've seen friends who I graduated with either being killed, or selling and using drugs. Over the years, they continued to do the same thing. I knew I didn't want to live back in the area in which I grew up in because there was nothing there. I have seen so much damage in my life at an early age, it just wasn't settling for me. So, I use that as motivation to continue to do the things that allow me to be successful.

Resilience in the academic setting. The participants describe their levels of resilience in the academic setting.

Aquil explains why he had to be very reserved with his peers during the initial years of high school:

> During my freshman year, it was very difficult, I was very quiet. I really didn't engage with my classmates for a number of reasons because some of them were very hostile. So, that was one of the reasons I waited to really make friends.

Aquil had to be resilient and overcome some academic challenges while in school:

> I had difficulty reading when I was in the 6th grade and 7th grade. It was around the time when teachers were still allowed to beat you in a classroom if you acted up. So, I had issues with opening up and engaging with my teachers because I feared them. And, so, I never asked questions and I kinda disengaged from the whole educational process. At some point, the librarian began to help me through these challenges.

Aquil explains the impact his college environment had on him as it was more diverse than his high school environment.

> At Dennison (college), they were more accepting and embracing people, from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. I didn't have to experience this in high school because most of my peers were all Black. They were like me, so I didn't have to question myself like I did in certain ways while at Dennison. So, I view my time there as being a blessing as well as a curse. A blessing because it helped me do a lot of introspection and reflection. It helped me grow as an individual. A curse in the sense that it was very painful. The growth was not easy, it was not an easy process. It was very painful. There were times when I just wanted to leave because I couldn't deal with the campus. But, it got better by my junior and senior years as more incoming classes came in.

Jamael describes his fervent desire to do well in school, despite the amount of hard work it took:

> One of the things I did was prayed to God for a second chance to do it right. I told God that I would get the best grades I could and eventually I did. I graduated summa cum laude in college. At that point, I could see how much farther I could go, even though I was burned out. I didn't want to be the type of man that would grow up and turn around and think about what I could've done. I didn't want to have unfulfilled goals. I needed to get all the stuff I needed to get to that point and keep pushing. That shows me resilience in the sense that I'm not going to give up. I'm gonna keep pushing it and do all that I can.

Contested prolificacy meshes with resilience theory as this stage is largely related to how Black men dealt with bouts of opposition, oppression and systemic challenges. The individuals in this study are considered resilient as they were met with severe adversity, subsequently achieving success despite this adversity (Woodland, 2016). Of the five common characteristics of resilience as cited by Hill (1972), the participants took full advantage of adaptable family roles, kinship networks and work ethic. For Aquil, dealing with the cultural mismatch of attending a predominately White university was quite a challenge for him. He underwent periods of initial shock, acceptance and eventually, balance. Ultimately, he learned to manage and take ownership of the environment and be true to who he was. Other participants speak of resilience in different arenas, home, community and school. Unbeknownst to James, his family economic state was dismal, but

he was not affected. This is because his parents effectively managed the household so that basic needs were met.

Likewise, contested prolificacy complements both the productive and subtractive extremes of Blackmaleness. The Black men in this study, coupled with the transgenerational collective force, contested the presence of social barriers constructed to make war with their self-potential (James & Lewis, 2014). According to Khalil, the state of the community he grew up in the same condition that it was when he was a child. While on a grand scale, we understand the deteriorating conditions of some urban environments tend to be intentional and systemic, those who have persevered academically make decisions to eventually opt for other living conditions. Khalil's education elevated his thinking and as a result, he was no longer content with living an unsettling life.

As related to the subtractive extreme of Blackmaleness, the Black men in this study experienced the nexus of social limitations, messaged and materialized as inescapable with the absolute disenfranchisement of Black males as the ultimate result (James & Lewis, p. 273). Jamael explains having to deal with racial insults from others. His mindset was to think positive, but be realistic. This was one of the formulas he used to stay out of trouble.

Community Proactivity

Findings in this section answer the research question: How did Black males benefit from social networks within the Black community? The second theme of the Ecology of Hope Model is community proactivity. The African American community is comprised of extended family, friends, and those of fictive kinship. These forces typically join to support, aid and serve as a resource to those within the community. It is important to

understand the benefit gained from the social capital of community networks. The African American community consist of interconnected assets, leveraged proactively to support the development of Black males. Members must take advantage of the strength that lies within the connectedness of this social system. Community life starts in the home and spans across the various arenas that members come in contact with, including, but not limited to schools, places of worship, recreation sites, local businesses, etc… The Ecology of Hope Model supports community proactivity as exampled in the counternarratives included in this study.

Avoiding trouble in society. Avoiding trouble in society is not always an easy decision when surrounded by peers who make poor decisions. Participants discuss their levels of societal resistance and ability to avoid trouble in their respective environments.

Aquil explains how he avoided trouble in the midst of his peers making poor decisions:

> I have survived the poor influence of being in situations and predicaments that my other classmates or peers have fallen into. I think, for me, avoidance of trouble was shifting my mindset because it's easier (for me) to do something wrong. But, to do something that is right and maintain a standard for yourself, whether it be morals or anything else. It takes practice and time.

Faris attributes his respect for and fear of his mother to his decision to avoid trouble in society:

> First, I was more afraid of my mother than I was afraid of the people on the street. Eventually, you can get away from those people, but I can't really get away from

> my mom. I was never really intrigued by the idea of selling drugs. It never really appealed to me because my mother was very honest with me about the cost of selling drugs. It was either getting arrested and going to jail, her beating the hell out of me, or witnessing the aftermath of what drugs did to my dad's side of the family. Seeing how it destroyed my family, it just never really appealed to me. I was never attracted to the thought of going to jail.

Jamael, being one of the younger siblings, had several opportunities to observe his older brothers and sisters. This provided him with a frame of reference to decide between right and wrong:

> I do feel that because I had other brothers and sisters when I was born, I was always able to watch what they did and learn what not to do, if that makes sense. So, staying out of trouble was just a matter of me watching someone else getting into the same crap. I've been in a lot of stuff since I've been to college. Who hasn't? But, I was smart enough to learn to apply what I learned when I was growing up. I was still able to apply what my mother taught me to situations I dealt with.

Jibril's faith is what helped him manage trouble in society:

> For the most part, I avoided trouble because I was one of those people who was pretty much scared to get in trouble. I was surrounded by so many positive things in my life and Christian family members. Every time I would try to do something bad, I would always hear a voice in my head saying something like, "God is going to get you for that". I just couldn't do it because of that inner voice that was telling

me it's not right. I work so hard for things and I know I don't want to lose them. That's very important for me. I didn't want to disappoint myself or my family.

Kehlin's personal self-discipline and involvement in an extracurricular activity kept him off the streets and out of trouble:

> I had self-discipline. My sister was a great model for me also. She set a great example for me to stay on track and stay out of trouble. I used to be in a singing group in high school and I didn't have time to go into the streets and do things that were unimportant to me. I was so into the music and I wanted to be successful with that, so I basically stayed engulfed in the studio. The group and I pretty much did the music thing the entire four years of high school. That kept me going on the straight and narrow path.

Benefits of Imani. Imani is a community-based, school mentoring program created to help males of color successfully negotiate their school environments by establishing positive academic and social identities for themselves. The young men in this study found great benefit in being part of such a collaboration.

Aquil credits the mentors at Imani for helping him develop the endurance necessary to push through to success:

> Imani helped me develop the level of strength, courage and tenacity to push forward, whether the obstacles were a mountain or a little puff. The Imani mentors all played essential roles in helping me develop outside of the academic strip and helped build my self-esteem. They prepared me to go to college. Ms. Cooper, who was my former coach at Aim, showed me that to achieve excellence, I had to put

> in hard work. She explained to me that I had to give my all. And even if I fail, I have to get right back up and do it, again. Without her counseling, advising, and mentorship, I don't think I would be in the position that I'm in now.

Imani's presence expressed a strong sense of care for Aquil:

> They were present throughout my whole process of high school and in almost every element of it. They showed that they cared. Another important thing is they helped our teachers understand us better and that helped break the ice. We became not just a number in the classroom. They helped our teachers understand that we had personality, aspirations and dreams.

Aquil explains how Imani was also influential in helping its members manage the dynamics of their environments through productive dialogue:

> Our parents could ask questions that moved beyond the school. It was understood that academics is affected by a lot of things. It's affected by your family environment, politics and by the community you reside in. Being given the opportunity to be able to look at and deal with these issues, within a community, helps you focus more on academics. We were given the liberty to get out our pent-up anxiety and frustration. Just the mere fact that we were able to talk about those issues, in that space, helped us realize that we were not alone in the process.

Faris appreciates the mentorship aspect of Imani. The vision of Imani was clear to him, from the beginning, and he was in tune with it:

> Real mentorship is very important. Those types of relationships were very important for me in high school and college. Having people who you could actually

> have a conversation with about what you're facing in the world was great to have a young man. One of my mentors was a young, Jewish woman who provided me insight into a lens that I didn't have. So, I would say mentorship was far more important that any scholarship or care package.
>
> Also, Imani's vision is clear. I think Imani is doing well because they understand that it's not a magic potion. They don't just indoctrinate kids to believe in something that they don't already agree with. They meet people where they are. Imani helps you explore your options and accepts your limitations. That's big for me.

For Jamael, Imani added value to the conversation related to post-high school success. They were always supportive:

> Imani embraced me as a young man and was one of the organizations that explained to us the importance of preparing early for college. They help set me up with scholarships. I don't think there was anybody on the Imani staff that wasn't willing to help me. I think they're doing an admirable job and using a lot of different resources, exhausting all options, to help the children then serve.

Jamael describes Imani as one of the few, if not only, organizations that provided the level of support they did:

> Imani did so well, when I was in school, because there were really no other organizations doing the things they did. There is an overwhelming cry for support in the African American community, especially the one Imani is working in. There were so many kids falling by the wayside when I was in school. I'm sure that

> number has doubled or tripled by now. Imani had the kind of people who let you know you were going to be successful. They were able to touch people's lives in a way that others cannot. You know what I mean?

James became involved with Imani in the latter part of his high school years, but immediately recognized the benefit of the program:

> Imani did an excellent job with providing a strong support system and helping us see our own potential. I think Imani is still doing well because they have been around for such a long time. Part of what they realize is that to tap into the lives of urban youth, or people in general, you must have a long history. People need to see the good times, the bad times and the relationships that you've established and maintained. Imani establishes great relationships with students, helping them in high school and beyond. I came to them at the end of my junior year of high school and they started helping me immediately. Even after high school, they helped me understand how to operate in college and taught the importance of time management. They were a strong base of support during my college years, providing my basic needs (care packages), and staying in touch.

Jibril's high school experience was better once Imani began to support his goals. Imani held a powerful presence and served as a strong support system for Jibril:

> My experience at Aim became so much easier when I joined Imani. For the most part, I saw a brighter future as they began preparing us for college.
>
> Imani was very present in my life and touched on every individual aspect of who I was. They were powerful enough to me that I wanted to listen to them and take

into consideration what they were saying. They knew exactly who I was a person. They represented a group of individuals with different resources who reached out to and helped a group of people that everyone wasn't willing to work with. They came from the heart. A lot of people want to achieve, but really don't have people to push them or help them reach out. Imani was that set of people in our community. They were consistent, they wanted to hear your story, and they wanted to get your story back to the community to help others.

Kehlin appreciates Imani for helping youth explore their future options in life:

> My mentor, in Imani, always stayed on top of me and made sure I was handling the things I needed to handle. I think Imani is doing well because they involve a lot of students. They try to show them that this isn't the only way of life, you can pick a different route. They encouraged us to take the safer route for a better life.

Khalil, like James, joined Imani later in high school. He describes the benefit provided by the organization once he decided to be committed:

> I knew of Imani, but didn't start collaborating with them until later in high school. They got my brother into college, my sister money and helped a lot of the upper classmen. Imani was one of the exceptional groups and organizations that played an enormous role in my high school and college life. They were around, from day one, and have been there ever since. In my junior year, I devoted every single change I got to them, whether it was my lunch time or gym period. I believed in them and they believed in me. They could give me scholarships, help me get into the school of my choice, and basically helped me navigate college.

Next steps for Imani. Along with finding benefit, there are some areas that the participants thought could be improved for future program development.

Aquil thinks Imani should strengthen the mentorship by creating routine opportunities for alumni to give back through their narratives. He also talks about how necessary it is to know what course of study you want to follow in college. He wishes he was guided, more intentionally, in this area:

> I think having alumni like myself come back and speak to African American males about the ins and outs of college life would help. We could focus on the academic, social and even financial aspect of college as it's not cheap. So, getting them to understand that and making them aware that it's more than academics. So, I think that a direct mentorship experience would be important. And, not just like one or two showings, but something that is more consistent, to speak with and hear them. On a career development level, it would've helped, for me, to have more exposure to specific vocations. When I left high school, I really wasn't aware of the academic prerequisites and tracks that I could take. Helping young people making sense of what they want to do with their lives and showing them exactly how to do it is a big thing.

Faris would like for Imani to push high school students past their comfort zones, to think bigger and outside the box. He also imagines it would be better if Imani alumni kept in touch, during college, through event planning of some sort:

> I would say that Imani should push high school students to think outside the box. So, if a kid wants to be a garbage man, help them figure out how to be the best

> garbage man there is. So, I would say just finding ways to force students to think bigger than what they are and what they think.
>
> The care packages that Imani sends while in college were great. But, I wished we would've had more involvement, after high school, like planned events or something. That way we could've stayed in touch and supported each other better.

James shares similar views, with other participants, of what Imani could do moving forward. He suggests building more stronger alumni ties and providing opportunities for professional growth while in college:

> I think a lot of success can happen if they open up or have more of a fellowship with college students when they graduate. Like, graduates could come back and help students involved with Imani. This would also serve as a means of professional growth and adequate experience. This professional experience would benefit alumni as they search for jobs. I think that by strengthening alumni ties, alumni support will increase as well. And, this will help broaden our networking unit.
>
> Imani has always provided me with opportunities. Continuously improving on those type of experiences, like internships and fellowships, while in college, would help us develop more as career professionals.

Being more prepared for college is something that Kehlin wished he would've been. He sees one of Imani next steps as possible preparing high school students for the authentic college experience:

> I don't know if they now have classes for college development, but I wish they would have when I was in high school. I wished I had more preparation for it when I was in high school. That would have been a big help back then.

Kehlin feels like Imani should begin to staff successful African American males, from similar communities, to support the high school students:

> I believe that if there were more males who came from the same place, like myself, and decided to work for Imani, the students would make greater connections. If they know you've been through the trenches, been where they are now and were able to overcome the obstacles, it would benefit them. It could be sort of like a big brother type of program to let them know that even though you have challenges, you can still make it out, be resilient and do what you have to do to get yourself ahead.

Khalil wishes for Imani to broaden their support base to other urban schools. He thinks that it would be beneficial if Imani was stationed on the university level as well:

> I don't know if they've expanded or not, but, Imani really should be in more schools. I haven't been on the website in a while, so I haven't seen any of the updates. But, I would say they should get in more schools and offer their excellent services to other low-income area high school students. That's if it's not something they're already doing.
>
> Imani should visit colleges more and continue to do college trips. They should push into the college setting to help students who don't know the ropes. Maybe

they can set up some kind of office or something so low-income students can have access to their services.

Spiritual upbringing. The participants in this study explain their different levels of spiritual upbringing and how their experiences with religion or spirituality shaped their thinking and lives:

Aquil explains the complexity of religion in his family:

> Religion in my family is very complex. My grandmother, on my father's side, is a Jehovah's Witness. So, most of my religious and spiritual understanding comes from that denomination. She goes door to door, tells people about Jehovah God and explains the whole system of belief. So, that has shaped me in a way. I was active in going to the Kingdom Hall when I was younger, but I began to look at religion with more of a critical eye as I got older. I kind of fell off from attending Kingdom Hall and not consider myself non-denominational. Because we were Jehovah's Witness, I never knew about my family members where were Baptist, Church of God in Christ or Black Israelite. I also have family members who don't attend a particular church, but are spiritually founded. So, yeah, my spiritual upbringing was complex.

Jamael's mother was active in the church and made sure he was involved as well:

> My mom was a very developed Christian, so we went to church at least three days a week. She was what you would consider a "prayer warrior" because she was always in church. Our church did a city program where we fed the homeless and stuff like that. We were heavily involved in that. As a matter of fact, I was the first

> one in my family to actually start volunteering on a higher level with the homeless every Friday. I would try to help them as much as possible. So, we were always in church and in the community doing something.

James' family didn't have a presence in church, which ultimately shaped his thoughts on attending:

> My family was never religious, so I never really believed in any religion. They never went to church or had any ties to churches of any sort. I know that I am spiritual because I do believe in God, however, church wasn't one of those things that was pressed upon me. And to this day, I still don't attend church because I never had any association with the church. So, I didn't see the benefit of being part of a church family or anything like that.

Church support. Having support, outside of the home and school environments, is indeed an asset. Participants explain how church members supported them in their goals to achieve success.

Faris' church relationships encouraged him and help keep him grounded:

> Sometimes church can be a little restrictive, but it's certainly a community. I have a few good relationships with sisters at my church. They hold me accountable. They give their opinions, even when I don't ask for them. Every chance they get, they're trying to marry me off. My church members were the people who helped me when I couldn't find a job. They told me I still had value when I didn't feel that way.

Jamael found a strong sense of family within his church. He experienced support every step of the way:

> My moral support was through the church, through the pastor and his family. The pastor's family was just as big as my family, so we're really close. Our church was more of a family church, it was not one of those big mega churches or anything like that. So, because it was a small church, there were a lot of more personal relationships and that helped me a whole lot. My pastor and the congregation would always make sure my family was okay. They set us up with scholarships and did everything to boost our lives, whether it was personal, social, religious or academic.
>
> My pastor is a good person, a really good man. He tried to step in once my dad died and did everything he could to help us. He never really gave up on me and always supported me.

Jibril's church family helped in different ways and were an integral part of his development:

> I come from a very supportive, church-going family. So, my church family is very involved in my life. My pastor worked in the community, so he would know when I would get in trouble at school. He would also come to the school to check on me. So, if he caught me doing something that I wasn't supposed to be doing, he would get on top of it. My pastor wrote recommendation letters for me for college. He was there to witness my development from youth to an adult.

> The congregation always came together as a team. There were a lot of people who had children my age, so everyone reached out to help one another. Members had different roles and jobs in society, so they were able to give advice. I know in my church we had like three teachers who are teachers in the community schools. So, they were able to help tutor us in areas we were struggling in and give us good feedback on the schools.
>
> My family was always able to go to the church if we needed help or support. Our church family was there for us. My church also helped me get a job.

Community life. Community life bears great significance on the livelihood and progress of its members. Being involved in the community and taking advantage of the social networks that are available promote success.

Aquil's grandfather promoted the idea of community life through his actions and teachings:

> For a number of years, my grandfather worked for the park district and he coached basketball. Besides doing that, he would shovel snow from the entire block during the wintertime. During the summertime, he would cut neighbor's lawn because she was unable to do so herself. So, he was very active in the community and expanded the notion of what a family is. Also, he taught us that although you have family, blood relatives, your community members and neighbors serve as your outside family. He instilled in us a sense of nature versus nurture and how they complemented each other.

Aquil, very much an active member of his community, is dissatisfied with how African Americans have to be on guard, with law enforcement, in their own communities:

> I can't have the freedom in my own community like Asian people do in their community, or the Polish or Irish people do in their communities. I can't wake up in the morning, for the pure enjoyment of it, and go running without being on guard for law enforcement. It's like I always had to make sure I notify the police with either a head nod or verbally telling them what I'm doing. This is in my own community. I must do to this to get a free pass in the place that I call home, where I walk the streets to the grocery store or the corner store.

Faris' family fostered strong community ties through fellowshipping at the family's home:

> My family knew all the neighbors and all the neighbors knew them. They would all come over to barbecue. If one person had a barbecue, the whole neighborhood had a barbecue. So, everyone would come over. Everybody knew each other, and I think a lot of it was because of my grandmother. The house she lived in was the house she raised my mother and my mother's siblings in. So, they all grew up in that house, on that block, and all the kids knew each other. All the families knew each other. It's a little bit different now that everyone has moved away, but that was the community life I experienced growing up.

Jamael initially wasn't actively involved in his immediate community as his family spent a great deal of time, away, at church. For five years he attended a school relatively far in distance from his immediate community. Therefore, he wasn't around much:

> Since we spent so much time in church, I didn't really intertwine with my community much or do activities around the community. There were other families, on our street, who were devout Christians, like my mom. So, they would get together and try to keep the kids engaged in positive thing. I went to Walt Disney Magnet School, which was the first magnet school in downtown Chicago. It took me over an hour to get to school and over an hour to get back home. Since my mom sent me far away to school, I wasn't in my community to do anything. It wasn't until I started going to high school in the area and getting involved with Imani that I started participating with community stuff.

James' community memories don't paint a particularly positive picture. He does explain how he was supported, however, amid community challenges. As an adult, he has committed his time to uplifting and supporting the community in his own unique way:

> I saw a lot of negative things growing up. My community was simply about drugs and sports. There weren't many community leaders out to support us or do anything that I can remember, to be honest. I occasionally remember books clubs, every now and then, or politicians coming around during election time. But, I don't remember any leaders other than the drug dealers. Speaking of drug dealers, these were some of my main supporters in the community. They believed in my sports ability. I was really good at basketball. They would take me under their wings and tell me I wasn't going the route they took. They told me I would achieve in college and hey would uplift me instead of trying to get me to do what they were doing. The would always that, "That boy is goin' to college. He goin' to be something in

> life". When I come around, now, some of the same dudes compare how I'm living to those who didn't take a similar route.
>
> Currently, I spend most of my time mentoring and doing other things such as sponsoring competitions and other public experiences. I'm heavily invested in the community now and in the community school. I'm continually reaching for success and trying to bridge the gap with young men in my community, pull them along the way. I want to continue to reach back into my community and pull those guys out of that mentality and have them see what they could be doing.

Kehlin, like James, recalls the weaknesses in his community life. He was, however, resilient through it all:

> The weaknesses in my community life were gangs, drug activity and a lot of negative peer pressure. I had a lot of friends who were into that life. But, I tried to stay away from it, as much as possible, and stay focused in school.

Khalil describes his present-day community involvement. He strives to be actively engaged in community life:

> I definitely try to be a role model to other young Black males. I also attend church consistently. My immediate and extended family can depend on me to be a person who's always reliable. I love the idea of being able to give back to my community. You know, like showing them that I'm young, but I went to school and they can too. I want them to know that they can do as good or better than I did.

Community violence and gang exposure. Some of the participants' lived experiences involved family members and friends that were gang members. The

participants explain how resilient they were in avoiding community violence and gang activity.

Jamael knew that he wasn't interested in gang activity and credits Imani for arriving at an opportune time:

> At one point, in high school, before Imani, there was really nothing to do. Many of my best friends were in a gang there, but I didn't associate with the gangs. My friends did and we would hang out sometimes. I knew that being a part of a gang wasn't something that I was interested in at all. When Imani came around, it gave me something else to do.

Jibril didn't have family members who engaged in gang activity, but he had many friends who did. He understands the stigma that this type of company could have on him:

> I had a lot of friends into gangs and gang banging. Some of them died from gang violence, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or, hanging out with the wrong crowds. Don't get me wrong, these people weren't the best people, but I hung around them. But, of course, I wasn't in a gang. I was never recruited into a gang, but I was guilty by association. None of my family members were in gangs and didn't partake in gang violence. So as far as being in a gang, I wasn't, but I was surrounded by them on a daily basis.

While in college, Jibril lost a very dear friend to community violence. He explains the impact it had on his life:

> I attended college with one of my good friends from the neighborhood. He grew up like three blocks away from me. During our sophomore year, he went home to

> go shopping for his birthday. He went to a mall that wasn't really an urban mall, but kind of suburban. He was involved in a case of mistaken identity and was shot and killed. That was my good friend, actually my best friend at the time. A real close friend, like a brother. I'd been around him for many years. It was tough losing him. We were always playing around, doing things together. Losing him made me want to give up. It really hurt me. That was the second friend I lost to gun violence. For us to be so young and to see a good person, who wasn't involved in negative things, become a product of the environment was sad and tough. I began to approach life differently. His death made me not want to visit home, because I felt like my city had too much negativity and I didn't want to be a part of it.

Like some of the other participants, Kehlin had friends who were directly affected by community violence. He drew his strength from the lessons he learned from his family:

> I have lots of friends. I have a friend who was killed freshman year. I have friends who are in jail for fifty years for drugs and things of that nature. So, I just tried to stay focused and follow the examples that my family left for me to follow.

Khalil also experienced the death of some of his friends at the hand of community violence:

> I've seen friends who I graduated with either ended up selling drugs or were killed. Over the years, they continued to do the same thing. I was interested in that life. I used it for motivation.

Survival tactics in the community. Survival of the fittest is certainly a realistic notion for participants in this study. The young men give their personal accounts of survival within their environments.

Ultimately, Aquil understands that you need to choose a path to follow. A large part of this path is related to survival:

> At the end of the day, one has to think about survival and I think that is uniquely different to the Black experience. In my experience, growing up where I did, you have to do what you need to do to survive. And, if the college track will help you in the survival process, then that is the one in which you should go. But, if you find another route that will help you survive, then that is the route you should take. For me, it's all about mindset. College was a survival tool for me because I was able to thrive in it. So, I don't need to resort to doing illegal things, selling drugs, robbing people, or any of that other stuff. I'm able to survive off of my intellect.

James explains the tool to survival in his community:

> I think that survival in our community is that you have to be that kid who has some type of social status. You have to be one that's known for holding his own. You have to learn how to stay out of other people's way and manage your own business. You're able to kinda fare well if you do this in my community.

The use of narratives to tell the stories about the lived experiences dates back to the times of Aristotle (Barthes, 1975). Critical Race Theory is essential to expand that forum to allow the voices of those, especially those of color, who have not gotten a chance to tell their stories by allowing those who have been silent to use story telling or counter-

narratives to illustrate the other side of history (Tate, 1997). Counterstories gave the Black men in this study a voice and allowed them to create representations of their lived experiences to provide knowledge that is different from that perceived or told by the dominant white culture, and they could provide insight into what could not have been felt otherwise (Ward, 2017). Whether they were avoiding trouble in the community, learning from the mistakes of those that came before them or giving back to the community, these situations gave them the strength and willingness to change the dominant narrative related to Black male success. Despite the countless barriers that have historically prevented black males from achieving a comparable level of academic achievement to white males, these participants found pockets of support that served as sources of motivation that helped prepare them and provided them with opportunities to be successful (Yosso, 2006).

Familial Perseverance

Findings in this section answer the research question: How did out of class learning experiences contribute to the academic success of Black males in college? The third theme of the Ecology of Hope Model is familial perseverance. The African American family, by nature, is resilient and perseveres through dynamic changes and periods of adversity or transition. The relationships that are formed and rooted in the family allow its members to build strong levels of trust and patience with one another. Many African-American families embrace flexible roles that incorporate varied models of shared decision making. These layers of extended family support promote a strong sense of resiliency in the Black community. Learned behaviors and positive dialogue in the family structure promote interdependence among family members and shared expectations that lead to cultivating

the inner potential of the family unit. Black families model the commitment needed for turning obstacles into opportunities.

At the same time, there are significant systemic challenges that continue to threaten the African American family structure. These challenges aid and abet a system that creates barriers for Black men to be patriarchs and maintainers of the family. Consequently, the challenges perpetuate single parenthood and broken home environments. This societal driven, dismantled household structure unconsciously induces high levels of familial strength and perseverance.

The majority of the Black men in this study were raised in households where they either had to play the paternal role or share the paternal role with an unpredictable parent figure. It is evident, through the voices of the participants, that these experiences made them stronger. Some of them persevered through less than favorable conditions to attain academic success. For the emancipation of the Black family lies within our innate abilities to manage and conquer periods of struggle. It is in these moments where the Black men in this study found hope.

Birth order. Birth order bears great significance in the lives of African American families. This is seemingly a discussion about how shared responsibility is embedded in the make-up of African American families. This section will provide a brief reference to the birth order of the participants in the study. This information is offered to put the participants' individual roles in the family into perspective.

> Aquil: I am the second oldest. So, I have a sister that's older than me and two sisters under me and a little brother.

Faris: I am the oldest in my family of 5 children.

Jamael: I am one of 12 children in the family. I am the second oldest.

James: I am the second oldest in my family, the second sibling. Being that type of leader and always having fortitude and the wherewithal to lead my family contributed to my success.

Jibril: Oldest

Kehlin: Second Oldest

Khalil: Second Oldest

Family strengths. The strength of the African American family is what propels us forward. We are a resilient people who benefit in times of distress. The participants describe the strength of their families and the related benefits.

Aquil comes from a close family. He explains the advantage of his family relationship:

> One strength is that my family is pretty close. Although it's really big, there's always someone there to help you. Like, when a problem comes up, you have help within the family.

Jibril describes his family as being considerate and conscious of his thoughts:

> My family is very supportive, and they are very consistent. They are very open to actually hearing my thoughts and feedback. They take into consideration my viewpoints of what I want to do. In my family, there was very good caretakers. We have people who actually care about each other in my family.

Kehlin's family, like Aquil's, is very close and supportive of each other:

> Well, the strengths I see in my family is that we all stick together and support pretty much each individual. We support each other in whatever endeavors we want to do. And they just want to see the entire family be successful.

Family weaknesses. As in every family, along with family strengths, are family weaknesses. Participants discuss the weaknesses in their families:

Aquil's family likes to give advice. At times, their advice isn't always timely:

> My family is very talkative. They give out good advice, sometimes. But sometimes, they don't know when to not give advice. It can be overwhelming.

James' father was absence during most of his childhood due to incarceration.

> For the most part of my adolescence and growing up, my father was in jail. So, my mother had to be the head of the household. This started when I was 12 years old.

Moreover, his family kept a distance from community life and engaged in drug use:

> My father and my family were very removed from the community. I come from a long history of people who are substance abusers. Most of my family were living life and doing drugs. We didn't have any social activities going on other than their use of drugs, from my point of view.

Family support. One extension of the African American family's collective strength is drawn from the support members receive from each other. Participants describe the support they received from their families.

Both of Aquil's grandmothers were supportive throughout his formative years:

> With spiritual help, finances, and everything else, both of my grandmothers have been very supportive. So, if I have questions or need help with anything, I go to

them. They have been my rock and supported me unconditionally throughout my whole high school, college and graduate careers.

Jibril's family offered support by providing him with his basic needs and wants:

> For the most part, my family was very supportive. They gave me a lot of things that I needed and wanted. This was so I wouldn't need to seek help or attention from anyone else. Or, so I wouldn't get caught up in the wrong thing. With their support, I was always in the right place at the right time for the most part.

Kehlin speaks of a cousin who was very supportive of him and advised him in purposeful ways:

> The most influential person in my success would have to be my cousin, Corey. He has his Master's degree and we're the same age. He's so much further along that I am, academic wise. He's living his life, in his profession, and always makes me strive to do better. He always gives me good advice and tries to help me keep my head straight. He would always invite me over to use his laptop if I had work to complete.

Khalil's support came primarily from his family. He doesn't credit the community or church for his success:

> No one in the community or in the church was most influential in my success. Particularly, it was my mother and my brother. They stayed on me so much. My oldest brother was very supportive.

Loss of parent. Losing a parent, during childhood, can greatly affect future success and progress. Participants share how the loss of parent shaped their lives.

Aquil lost his mother at an early age. He explains how little he understood about death and its effect on his life:

> My mother passed away when I was 10. I was so shocked and didn't understand death. She died in my arms. I saw how life and death quickly switch out and how a person can be alive and, then, in a few seconds not be there. I didn't quite understand that. I guess one of my eternal questions is always to understand the process of death as I begin to position myself in different spaces. I spent a lot of time living a full life and at the same time, understanding the concept of death. With reflection and engaging in deep thought, it made me appreciate life and people more. My life has been based off of maintaining a sense of freedom and living it to the fullest without trying to damage other people.

Jamael's father died during his freshman year in high school. This changed his mindset about education and had a major effect on his family:

> I was a freshman in high school when my father passed away. I was working a summer enrichment job. My mom called to let the principal know that my father passed away. From that moment on, in my world, my life obviously changed. My perspective on education was significantly altered. My father did more than enough during the time we had him. When he passed away, my mother picked up where he left off and helped where she could. Things became more stressful as a family because we didn't have that other dynamic. My father was a jack of all trades. So, things that had to do with maintenance and financial support, he was the one.

Positive description of mother. As we know many African American mothers have to be the head ruler or matriarch in the family. Participants offer positive descriptions of their mothers as they describe their individual levels of strength.

Faris thinks of his mother as an intuitive, resilient fighter:

> In terms of strength, I think of my mom as a fighter. If she believes in something, she goes out to get it. Her predictions are usually right. I respect her a lot for this. She's very resilient, very much a fighter, and can make a dollar out of 15 cents. She's able to make something out of nothing.

James describes his mother as a strong leader. Her fierce leadership made him question his father's role in the family:

> My mother is a very strong woman. She was a leader. I saw my mother leading more than my father leading. This made me question my father's manhood and what role he should've been playing in our lives.

Jibril's mother was very positive, caring and supportive:

> Every man loves their momma. My mother was just so positive. She is so strong and was always very present. She supported me, no matter what. I never felt like there was anything I couldn't talk to my mother about.

Parental support. When parents support their children's goals and aspirations, they are more apt to accomplish goals and push through difficult moments to achieve success. Participants understand the importance of parental support and involvement and discuss their experiences with both.

Faris recalls his mother's level of involvement throughout his schooling:

> I would say my mom was very involved very early on and throughout my primary and secondary education. She was at the school all the time, like involved in school councils. All my teachers and all my principals knew her. They knew what she looked like. They always threatened me with that.

Jamael respects the level of support his mother provides. He explains how her level of formal education doesn't dictate her level of involvement:

> Well, my mom, she's always there. She only has a high school education. She has a high school diploma. She may not know how to tell me about counseling and English or anything on that level. But, she definitely can encourage me to continue to do all that I can learn in order to be successful and do what I have to do.

James' parents were influential in speaking the language of success in his household. He attributes his tenacity to push through obstacles to both parents:

> Ultimately, I developed the idea of wanting to achieve more and set my standards high from my family. This led to me wanting to achieve in college. My mother and father always told me that I could do it and that I was really smart. They really praised me. This gave me the self-esteem and courage I needed to continue.

Kehlin's parents, like many of the other participants, stayed on him. They, too, wanted him to achieve excellence:

> My mother always stayed on me. My father did too. Both my parents stayed on me to complete what I started. They always gave me pep talks and checked up on me to make sure I stayed on track.

Racial socialization and racial identity are both recognized as culturally relevant factors that promote healthy psychosocial functioning, and academic performance of African American youth (Hughes et al., 2006; Jones & Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umana-Taylor, 2012). Racial socialization pairs seamlessly with familial perseverance as these practices promote the culturally appropriate values and behaviors necessary to cope in underserved environments. The African American family is resilient and perseveres through periods of adversity, and transfers this capacity to Black males. Participants in this study provide insight related to the messages and practices, as carried by their caregivers, that raised their overall level of cultural awareness.

Parents and caregivers, alike, must be intentional when preparing their children to interact with racial discrimination and bias present in their own environments. Black males have to be equipped with the proper dialogue to counteract racially motivated messages in society and unethical treatment. When Black males are socialized within a racial context, they are able to adopt a proactive, intelligent approach to managing factors in the community that hamper their progress.

Academic Persistence

Findings in this section answer the research question: How did Black males leverage the various resources within their social networks to develop an achievement persona and persist academically? The fourth theme of the Ecology of Hope Model is academic persistence. Educators who offer valuable support and serve as change agents are typically successful in assisting Black male students with academic goal achievement. Institutional support is a key feature of Black male academic success. Resilience literature

teaches us that individuals must encounter both risk and positive adaptation to experience adjustment or recovery (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Resilience research suggests that Black youth, raised in urban environments, are placed at risk by default, and are in danger of academic failure. Moreover, their survivability depends solely on the communal support structures and their ability to adapt in the face of hardships. The protective factors, as outlined in resiliency, don't mesh with an intimate understanding of the Black community. Black communities are intrinsically strong and are created with the tools needed to persist. Understanding resilience, in its truest sense, provides a more in depth understanding of the layers of adversity that threaten the Black male's pursuit to achieve academic success.

Academic tenacity. Determination is a key component of ultimate success. The Black men in this study experienced struggles within the educational realm. During these challenging times, they remained steadfast in their pursuit of excellence. Participants discuss their experiences with academic tenacity.

Aquil's persistence helped shape his academic success:

> Being persistent is not about being boxed in. Being persistent involves telling people, "This is who I am", "I am who I am", and "I can be no other". I was not willing to change for others or conform to their mode of thinking. I made a decision to be exactly who I was. I chose to exude, live and exist in the space I was in. So, being persistent was a part of my identity and helped influence my academics. I really didn't spend much time thinking about the outcome. I stayed focused on the journey I was on.

Jamael always knew he wanted his higher education experience to be outside of the state he grew up in. He wanted to travel and explore a different environment. He believed he would excel if he left the environment he was raised in:

> I always knew I wanted to do something outside of the state I lived in. Out of all of my brothers and sisters, I'm the first person to travel out of the state, to actually do some kind of post-secondary education. So, we decided that I was going to get out there and do something different, and I did. I went out of state to school and I've been there ever since. I'm working on my third degree now – my doctorate in education.

Kehlin doesn't consider himself to have strong study skills. As a result, he tends to be more of a "crunch time" person. He came up with his own method of working through this challenge during his journey to academic success:

> Well, as far as academics, I'm not a very good studier. I'm more of a crunch time person, like last minute. I'm good if I have at least a day to study for a test. That's when I'm gonna make my best grade. I take in information better this way. I had a big problem with math at first, but I just stuck to it and I've seen a few tutors. I'm doing pretty well now. I made sure I stayed focused and concentrated on the things I needed to concentrate on. I did things in almost a step pattern. I just take small steps. I do one section first, then the second section, and so on. I think I can get things done quicker when I have a process and steps to it.

High school experience as an African American male. The high experience can present certain challenges for the African American male if the environment isn't

culturally proficient and conducive to student success. Participants discuss their high school experiences as African American males.

Aquil's ability to fit in with most environments helped him navigate the social spaces of high school. He also explains how his involvement in one of the school's extracurricular programs helped him map out his collegiate course of study:

> In high school, I was more so like a chameleon. I never fit into one particular group, so I never had strong ties or allegiances to just one group. I could mingle with the jocks, mingle with different school clubs, or hang out with people on the debate team. I was able to navigate that space pretty easy. During my junior and senior year, it was easier, as I was older and ranked at the top of my class. My ability to navigate the space with ease helped me with my development as well. I never got stuck in one mindset or identity. So, I didn't have issues that other students had to deal with as far as meeting new people.
>
> I was also doing mentorship work at school and was a member of the ROTC. I was active in an instructional role with ROTC, instructing cadets in drills and leadership development. So, I was kind of teaching some of them the core instructions as far as being a leader was concerned. This impact gave me the idea that I would be a good teacher as well. So, when I graduated from college, I decided to focus on studying education.

Faris felt an overall sense of community and success at his high school. He felt like he belonged:

> I know in high school, it was very much a community. It felt like when I was successful, my school was successful. When my school was successful, I was successful. So, there was a shared sense of outcome. This shared outcome, to me, meant I couldn't succeed without the school succeeding. And, they couldn't succeed without me succeeding. I miss that a lot.

James' high school experience was met with a variety of transition. Attending three different high schools gave him a sense of awareness and helped put his desire to succeed in perspective:

> Well, my experience as an African American in high school is vastly different. I attended three different high schools. At my first high school, I was pretty much an athlete. This was expected. It was a predominately African American school. I have a long history of family attending that school. It was kind of rough because it was gang-infested and most of my family are gang members. They were split up in gangs, sort of like rivalries within the school. So, they were torn between the two gangs. I was trying to be a student athlete, trying to get good grades. But, ultimately, I had to pick a battle. At that time, I chose to swim with them, which got me kicked out of the first high school. Then I went to a boarding school. It wasn't for me because it was too structured. I did like the calmness and the routine, though. It was a place that allowed me to focus and decide what I wanted to do. But, I ended up leaving that institution to pursue athletics. That's how I ended up at Aim High School. I spent my junior and high school years at Aim. It was smooth sailing. It was totally different than my first high school and was safer. Plus, I grew

> up in the neighborhood around Aim, so I knew some people there. It was smooth sailing, so to speak.

Jibril describes the atmosphere of his high school and his overall experience:

> There were a lot of friends from my community attending my high school. My age group was doing a lot of fighting and into drugs. It was more of like a fashion show type of thing there. And, you had to pay attention to the clothes and colors you wore. Like, if you were in a gang, you wore white shirts. If you wore pants, you had to wear Dickies, and keep the price tag attached. But, the experience was a good experience. I initially was doing my own thing until the Imani program reached out to me. I think that's how it happened. I got invited to join the National Honor Society and then the doors just opened up for me.

High school mentors. Mentors play major roles in the academic success of students. Participants describe the influences of their high school mentors.

Aquil had several high school mentors. His high school mentors were engaging, positive and encouraged him to maximize his full potential.

> I had two teachers, my ROTC instructors and some of the school staff who demanded the best out of me and pushed me to reach my highest potential. Without them in my corner, I would've failed. They really gave me the extra boost necessary to take risks. The Imani staff helped me with aspects of my self-esteem. Then, there were school staff members and paraprofessionals who helped me use my new-found courage to actually take risks and break out of my shell. The ROTC staff helped me understand the ins and outs of leadership.

> My debate coach taught at my high school during my freshman, sophomore and junior years. She helped me a lot along the way. She was that support system I needed when I couldn't pass the ACT. She was the person I went to.
>
> The librarian opened up the world of reading to me. She knew I struggled with reading. She took me to the side and found out the types of books I liked. She told me she was going to get me to a point where I could read the books, on my own, without assistance from anyone else. She worked with me every day after school and I remember her to this day.

Jamael understands and appreciates the importance of high school mentors and recognizes the impact they had on his life:

> One of my English teachers, who's not at the school anymore, was very involved. He was fresh out of college. I think we were his test case. He took us in and made sure we were literate on all things English. He made sure we knew how to do things like write a memoir and decipher Shakespeare. I mean he really went over and beyond.
>
> My guidance counselor was the sponsor of the National Honor Society and everybody loved her. She was always there for us, after school, and on the weekends.
>
> My Imani mentors stayed on me. They made sure I applied to as many colleges as possible, even some I didn't know. They knew about African Americans and African American males and the opportunities that we sometimes missed. They

encouraged me to take advantage of everything available and pushed me in the right direction.

James' high school mentor was adamant about him attending college. He explains how he wasn't initially interested in going to college and how she pushed him to apply and attend:

> I love my high school mentor so much. She did so much work for me. I ultimately got into college because of her. She pretty much made me go to college. During my senior year, I wasn't thinking about college. My mind was focused on basketball and just living. I had a very laid-back attitude. Every day, she asked me what college I was going to and had I filled out any application. My reply was always, "Nah, not really". One day, she had the college application in her hand and walked me through it, step by step. Even when I got denied from the one college I applied to, she reached out to the school and told them I would be an excellent candidate. She expressed that my aptitude for success was very high and she believed me. This ultimately led me to getting into that college.

Jibril found value in knowing that teachers in his school, even some who didn't know him very well, were pushing him to succeed:

> It was amazing to me to have teachers in the school, who were kind of like strangers, help dictate my life. They saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. They pushed me and didn't give up on me. They had a strong influence on me.

College experience as an African American male. The college experience, much like the high school experience, comes with its set of obstacles as well. This is more so

prevalent if the environment isn't remotely close to what they are used to. Two participants discuss their experiences and how they dealt with adversity.

Aquil often felt lonely as his college lacked diversity and his personal relationships were minimal:

> One issue was I didn't have a person that I could really engage with or talk to on a personal level because there were very few of us. So, it was often lonely because of the lack of diversity. But, it got better by my junior and senior years as more incoming classes came in. But, you still want that person in your class that you can talk to.

Because James never envisioned himself attending college, his beginning experience was stressful:

> College was a very tumultuous period for me the first two years. I struggled to find my place with college. I never saw myself as a college student. So, just being in college, at the time, was a struggle. I was struggling with the idea of staying or leaving. I felt like somebody else could take advantage of the education I was so unsure about. I was just holding up space. But, after I began to develop relationships and learned to settle in, it started getting easier for me. I begin to see myself as belonging and was pretty sure I would graduate from the university.

College mentors. Having a college mentor enabled some of the participants to stay focused as they negotiated their academic success.

Aquil gives credit to his college mentor for giving him the guidance necessary to navigating certain aspects of the institution:

> In college, my college mentor was Eric Follie, associate dean of Multicultural Student Affairs. He really took me under his wings, helped me understand the institution and taught me how to navigate it. And, so, without him, I don't think I would have been as successful as I was in college. Or, as I am now, without his mentorship.

Jamael understands the impact that mentors have on students. One of his high school mentors was very supportive of him during his college years as well. He speaks fondly of him:

> My mentor helped me with some college level papers during my undergrad years. That's one of the best people that you'd ever need and he really did help us a whole lot. I know he's still an educator now, but I really wish he still taught at my old high school. I wish he could help the kids that are going there now because I'm sure each generation is getting worse and they need certain teachers, like him, that will help as much as possible.

James' college mentor was instrumental in reinforcing his desire to succeed through her involvement. She was the primary reason he decided to stay in college:

> Mrs. Muhammad took me under her wings. She was like a mother figure and she taught me how to navigate through college. She really held my hand during the first year of my college experience, which ultimately set me up for success. I believe the first two semesters of college were very, very important. If I didn't have her, holding my hand, molding me, and building my self-esteem, I probably would have left.

Institutional Inopportunity. The Black men in this study went through periods of time when they were not given fair and equal access to educational opportunities**.** They discuss both their high school and college experiences with institutional inopportunity. Aquil feels like there was a missing element related to how his high school teachers engaged in student development. He feels like most of them only focused on the academic aspect:

> Developing the social element in students was one thing that didn't happen in the classroom. The teachers spent so much time teaching us with direct instruction, they didn't help develop the other aspects of the young people they were teaching. They were not strong at helping students mature or develop as individuals.

Jamael's high school teachers focused more on behavior than education:

> I did not realize, at first, that my high school mostly dealt with behavior modification. They didn't spend a lot of time on academic support. There were plenty of times when a teacher was more than willing to tell children to go sit down, be quiet and get to work. But, there were fewer times where they actually showed students how to do the work.

James didn't feel challenged enough in high school or supported enough in college:

> High school was pretty much a breeze for me as far as the academics. I think it was too easy, primarily because I wasn't challenged. I didn't identify with the curriculum and I knew it was sub-par. And, because of that, I didn't try. I gave them what they wanted, and I wanted nothing more to do but graduate and get the hell out of high school.

College, on the other hand, was a hard time for me. Initially, I really wasn't sure what I wanted to major in. I struggled a little bit and then decided my passion was law. They didn't have a program for law, so my passion kind of died down. I was still trying to find out what I wanted to be. I still didn't understand what it took to become a lawyer and my college wasn't much help. They didn't do a great job of being there to coach us and help us figure out what we wanted to do.

Unrealized dreams from college. Participants shared their unrealized dreams in life. They discuss the goals they are still hoping to pursue.

Aquil is still striving to meet a professional goal he set in high school:

My trajectory was that I was going to go to graduate school and get my Master's in secondary education with a concentration in history. So, that's where I am now. I realized I wanted to be a teacher my senior year of high school. I'm still pursuing that goal.

Jamael has completed both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees, but still aspires to get a doctorate degree:

I'm still in school now. I have some dreams that haven't manifested yet. I'm a professional and working on my Master's degree. I have a desire to work on my doctorate degree in educational leadership or policymaking. I want to work either at the state department or on the government level. But, of course, it takes God, prayer, and a lot of networking.

James has goals that he has yet to accomplish, but still plans to:

My one goal is to continue my education and receive both a Master's degree in public policy or Master's degree in public administration. My ultimate career goal is to become a lawyer and practice criminal law. I also want to open a charter school for other average African American males to get a right start in life.

The participants in this study are quite naturally resilient, as every human being is created to be. Their personal goals to aspire greatness and to evolve out of the conditions in which they were raised helped mold their desire to achieve academic success. It seemingly stands to chance that their environmental conditions created an appetite, in them, for learning and being seekers of knowledge to benefit themselves and society. Their academic persistence is a result of them summoning the positive, collective forces within their respective communities.

Summary

The communities in which individuals live and thrive is one complete social system which includes the home, school and outside society. These social systems are organically interconnected to make up the total environment necessary for humans to navigate. The urban community, in his unique, dynamic form, can serve as a source of strength for African American males. The answers to our challenges rest within us.

Exploring resilience through a lens of positivity allows us to reimagine our outcomes for future success. In the present study, four major themes from the data collected from successful African American males who were raised in an urban, mid-western US city. As aforementioned, these themes represent major concepts that African American men can begin to reorganize themselves and their lives around. These themes

are: (1) contested prolificacy, (2) community proactivity, (3) familial perseverance, and (4) academic persistence. Collectively, these major concepts/themes create the Ecology of Hope Model. This chapter discussed each of the four themes as represented in the lives of the participants in this study. The analysis revealed that, on a grand scale, African Americans have to be the answer to their own questions. Our lived experiences and ability to transcend through challenges and attain success place us at promise. Active engagement within the communities we live in and building from our own strengths induce success. As a supportive, comprehensive unit, we will begin to witness more African American males who benefit from the internal and external systems within the community.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

As stated in earlier chapters, traditional resilience literature places the burden of managing societal implications squarely on the shoulders of marginalized groups. African Americans emerge from a history of shared wisdom and strength. African Americans draw from these support structures in the face of adversity. Remixing resilience forces us to change the narrative that has been long told by mainstream society. Counterstorytelling provides the avenue for this to happen. The only way we are going to learn about Black male success, on any level, is to hear from Black men. Hooks (2004) and Ladson-Billings (2007) see a greater need to ask better questions and seek out explanations using counterstories to find out from the source about what may be leading to these disparities. The counterstories told by the Black men in this study directly challenge the stories about them as told by their white counterparts, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002.

The overarching research question for this study is: How can the voices of college educated Black males inform efforts to promote success among Black males educated in urban environments? The voices of the African American men in this story provided them with an opportunity to tell the story that is typically translated and narrated by other groups. The voices of the Black men in this study were strong, stories robust, silencing the superficial voices that are largely disconnected from their life trajectories. Their narratives provide a first-hand account of what it takes to be successful in urban environments, which is the principal way to inform the efforts of those that follow in their

footsteps. As African Americans, we are the answer to our own questions. The Black men in this study knew themselves, their life histories and their experiences better than anyone else. They are capable of telling their own story. In doing so, they add integrity and great value to literature surrounding Black male success.

The present study was intended to explore the counternarratives of college educated African American males who graduated from an underserved urban high school in a large midwestern urban city. The participants described their lived experiences in the home, school and community environments. The inductive analysis process was comprised of the participants' voices. This case study explores the individual and collective journeys of African American males who successfully navigated institutional inopportunity to achieve college success. Furthermore, this study is based on a secondary analysis of archival data and an analysis of publicly available school profile and performance data. This chapter will address and be organized by the contribution to literature, limitations, recommendations and conclusion.

Contribution to Literature

The Ecology of Hope model sought to offer the avenues in which Black Males relate to their physical environment and society. This framework provides a visual model of how Black males should interact with and balance the social systems in which they are a part of. The current study proposes four interrelated concepts, that, when in concert with each other, allow Black males to access the benefit in life as resilient beings and to find hope in environments that can seemingly impede their progress. The four concepts: (1) contested prolificacy, (2) community proactivity, (3) familial perseverance, and (4)

academic persistence all act as a system organized by the characteristics patterns of the Black male's relationship with society. Moreover, these concepts support a model that advances, solidifies and adds value to the conceptual framework for this study.

The study expands the conversation surrounding Black male success by applying the theory of Blackmaleness to the context. The lived experience of Black males is not complete without an explanation of the developmental process they are forced to negotiate. Blackmaleness, defined as the multidimensional, shifting and oftentimes contradictory reality of Black males (James & Lewis, 2014), aligns with the life stories of the participants in this study. While the Black men in this study had their share of intimidating bouts of inopportunity, they remained encouraged and successfully navigated their journey to success. The inopportunity, as experienced by the participants in this study, was apparent in different aspects of their lives.

The men in this study gave examples of their experiences with both the subtractive and productive extremes of Blackmaleness. Aquil's negative encounter with law enforcement, resulting from racial profiling, was a clear example of Black male disenfranchisement. When an individual can't jog in the early morning hours in their own community, without being targeted, they are involuntarily being placed at risk. James explains how society's preconceived notions about Black men, where they live and what they know all played a part in his success. Instead of allowing these stigmas to discourage his growth, he used it as a source of motivation for his future success.

Collectively, these Black men contested, defied, resisted and persisted despite socially constructed obstacles that attempted to thwart their progress. Jibril, living amid

similar social barriers as the other participants, resisted trouble by being both faithful to his spiritual beliefs and his family unit. He embraced his home environment, which promoted positivity, God-consciousness, and respect for the family structure. Kehlin contested social barriers by being a self-disciplined observer of great role models within his family. It is also important to mention his involvement with a singing group as a means of staying out of trouble and on the right path.

The previous examples, as extracted from the counternarratives in this study, expand the theory of Blackmaleness as they allow us to not only gain a deeper understanding of the developmental process of Black males, they give a first-hand frame of reference into the lives of Black men who shared the common goal of academic success. Currently, the theory lays out the academic language useful to describe the developmental process of Black men. The study is complementary as it adds a layer associated with the real-life context of the Black male.

Resilience literature defines resiliency as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000). Individuals are considered resilient when they have been exposed to high risk and possess the wherewithal to positively adapt to their situational context. Research conducted by Hill (1972) include adaptable family roles, extended family and kinship networks and work ethic as significant components and notions of resilience as observed in African American families. Essentially, these models can be considered examples of co-parenting within the African American community, all recognized as support structures.

The present study expands resilience literature as the goal is to employ a more asset-based approach to resilience. Traditional resilience literature is problematic and perpetuates the idea that something is inherently wrong with the African American family structure, and at best, African Americans have to protect themselves from *themselves*. Within the conversation around resilience, it is imperative that African Americans not lose sight of the historical context. The historical vestiges of legally sanctioned exclusion and discrimination, coupled with the contemporary pervasiveness of unequal outcomes and racism, interact in complex ways and have a grave impact on educational attainment for African American youth (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). As we examine the life spaces of marginalized groups, it is important to understand the systemic obstacles that have been designed to stagnate the growth and productivity of African American males. This study is solution-based and explores the processes in which Black males summoned the positive, collective forces within their own communities to succeed. African Americans don't need to resist their own environments. African Americans need to be engaged in community proactivity. The tools necessary for Black males to triumph are embedded in the family, community and spiritual relationship structures.

Khalil's life was riddled with unfortunate happenings and accounts of community violence. However, his drive to prosper was greater than his circumstances. Although displeased with the state of the community he once lived in, he chose to activate his inner potential and remain motivated. Jamael's fervent desire to do well in school existed outside of any burden that he faced within the context of his life. These examples represent

the mental processes these young men experienced to achieve beyond circumstantial situations.

Family, community and church support all play chief roles in Black male success. While some would add these components to the definition of resilience, they are familiar representations that add value to the progressive lives of African Americans. Faris' mother was very involved in his schooling. He described her as being a central, present figure at his respective schools. Her active role as a parent pushed him to make wise choices at school. He also explains the sense of community and shared success he felt in high school. The idea of knowing you have a reliable support system is an asset to individual productivity.

Expanding the research on resilience literature requires the inclusion of language that correlates with the life experiences of African American men. Morales and Trotman (2011) provided a more useful definition of academic resilience, aligning accurately with the experiences of successful Black males when they describe the concept as the process and results that are part of the life story of any individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles. This definition adds clarity to the stages and outcomes that Black men experience.

The seminal Critical Race Theory was solidified as a result of the present study. Critical Race Theory is commonly used to analyze the experiences of historically underrepresented populations. Critical Race Theory begins with the notion that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society (Delgado, 1995). It is necessary to understand this concept as some of participants in the study were challenged with forms of inherent

racism during the course of their lives. As chronicled in the counternarratives of the participants, many of them had to manage ways to counter normalized racism in society. The accounts of apparent racism, as shared by participants, is one way this study solidifies Critical Race Theory as an appropriate framework to study Black men.

Another essential tenet of Critical Race Theory is counterstorytelling (Matsuda, 1995). The counterstories in this study gave the young African American men a voice to challenge majoritarian narratives of Black male success. As stated in Chapter 2, counterstorytelling was used as a methodological tool to reconceptualize research with African American males. The first-hand accounts of the Black men in this study offers the experiential knowledge needed to add to the literature about Black male success and leads to enhanced educational opportunities for African Americans. Critical Race Theory provides a suitable framework because it centers race at the core of its analysis, and recognizes other forms of oppression, namely, class and gender, which have significant implications for African American males (Howard, 2014).

The family serves a variety of important functions in the lives of African American children. Namely, it fosters the development of a personal frame of reference for self-identity, self-worth, achievement, group identity and other behaviors in society (McAdoo, 2002). Also, it provides comfort and affection, which lessen the negative and often deleterious consequences of racism (Murray & Mandara, 1999). As mentioned in Chapter 2, racial socialization refers to the process by which parents transmit both implicit and explicit messages about the meaning of one's race in a broader societal context (Coard & Sellers, 2005). The process by which the family shapes attitudes and beliefs about race,

with their children, has a resounding impact on the future progress and success of their youth. Racial socialization adds value to the context of the study as the participants discussed several instances where their positive decision-making and achievement was guided by consciously charged racialized messages of power and achievement in their households.

Limitations of Study

This study was conducted using archival data in the form of semi-structured interviews, publicly available school profile and performance data. The researcher understands that some ethical issues associated with conducting secondary analysis of data relate to the possibility of effective interpretation and analysis of data by those who come from a distance and are uninvolved in the process of data creation (Irwin, 2013). As a secondary analyst, my goal was to fully understand the research objectives, design and the research questions and methods used for data generation. Thick description was used to ensure the accounts provided were credible and show that the researcher was diligent the attempt to conduct respectable research (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Thick description is essential in order to transfer the original findings to another context, or individuals.

Member checking is an opportunity for members (participants) to check (approve) particular aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided (Doyle, 2007; Merriam, 1988). It is a way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experience (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Member checking is presenting a recording or draft copy of an observation or interview to the persons providing the

information and asking for correction and comment (Stake, 2010). Essentially, researchers are trying to achieve accuracy. Member checking helps to reduce errors and greatly protects human subjects. Since I will conduct a secondary analysis of archival data and the participants are far removed from the original data, not being able to employ member checking is a limitation of the current study.

Researchers who conduct primary qualitative studies have an opportunity to interact directly with participants and any related organizations included in the study. One challenge associated with conducting secondary analysis of archival data relates to the possibility of effective interpretation and analysis of data by those who come from a distance, uninvolved in the process of data creation (Irwin, 2013). This is another reason why thick description is so important in qualitative research. An additional limitation is the researcher not having an opportunity to visit the high school where the Black males attended or the chance to engage with leaders of Imani Student Development Corporation.

Reflections from an African American Mother

There are many things to be said about raising Black males. As an African American mother who spent many years raising two sons in the absence of an active father figure, my ultimate goal was to be the best parent and role model for them. To that end, I feel accomplished with my intended goal. It was without question, however, that Black men need to be actively present and vigilant in the rearing of their Black sons. In raising my sons, there were certain situations that, biologically, I was unable connect with. When my sons were going through the typical developmental stages that Black males undergo, they were silent. When they met societal resistance, they were silent. When they fell short

of my expectations, they were silent. I, however, was not. My parental style was somewhat aggressive and majorly effective, most times. My voice resonated boldly throughout our household. Honestly, my greatest fear, as an African American mother, was to witness my African American sons hitting the ground, face forward. The part of being there mother that challenged me most was providing an open, healthy avenue to hear their voices. I was so concerned about them making mistakes and the possibility of not having readily available answers for them. I leaned heavily on Almighty God to watch over my sons and assist in the process.

Raising children forces you to engage your complete internal forces in an ongoing effort and fight to shape and guide their lives. It is, without question, a challenging, yet honorable assignment. The voices of the Black men in this study were very impactful. Their voices stood still in my soul. Their stories added substantial value to the understanding of what Black males undergo throughout their formative stages of life. Their voices answered many questions that I once had as an African American mother of sons. In some instances, their voices told me what I should have done differently. Moreover, it confirmed that our boys want to be successful and hold fast to the language we use with them and what they were taught as children. Although my boys are 22 and 20, respectively, there is still work to be done. They are constantly in need of experienced adult guidance and wisdom. This study allowed me to gain insight into the grave importance and impact of racially socialized messages. Likewise, I am in a better position to offer advice to other African American mothers raising sons.

Recommendations

The overarching research question in this study sought to determine how the voices of college educated Black males informed effects to promote academic success in urban environments. Likewise, and in alignment with the present study, it is necessary to remix, rethink and inform traditional resilience literature to further impact the academic success of African American males. The recommendations that follow are intended as a form of guidance for stakeholders involved in the academic development and success of Black males.

Recommendations for mothers of African American males. For the young men in this study, resiliency was routinely exhibited in their homes. The majority of the young men were raised in single-parent households. Many of them spoke to the ways they had to manifest resiliency to deal with the different challenges they faced.

As African American mothers, it is important to evaluate and be reflective about prior relationships with the men in our families and in our lives. Sometimes, our relationships with our sons can be a manifestation of needs that were not met earlier in our lives and may subsequently affect our parenting style. African American mothers need to be honest and cognitive about prior interactions with men (father, brother, male relatives, husband, partner, etc…). Seemingly, if African American mothers had a negative experience, it is likely to assume that we can be either too harsh or too lenient on our sons based on past pain or anger. Consequently, this has an impact on how the Black males we raise interact with all aspects of society, human and physical. Essentially, it itits important

to make sure your needs as an African American woman do not negatively impact your parenting style.

Mothering is defined as treating a person with kindness and affection, trying to protect him or her from anything dangerous or difficult, and nurturing (Brown & Davis, 2000). Mothers, grandmothers, and even college personnel who "mother" largely influence Black manhood development in college (Dancy, 2012). Speaking positivity and from an angle of love are principal elements to raising successful Black men. The participants in this study spoke positively about their mothers and the impact their mothers had on their academic success.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, research shows that African American single mothers who used racial socialization, were instrumental in influencing school readiness and academic achievement in their sons (Hubbard, Lewis, & Johnson, 2014). Those deliberate messages, focused on resilience and racial pride, prepared the young men for imminent racial discrimination and academic success. Kehlin and Khalil both spoke about how their mothers stayed on them and were influential in enhancing their academic success. Faris' mother promoted messages of racial socialization by being very honest with him about the ills of society. Her overall goal was to prepare him for the real world and future success. Jamael applied and is still applying lessons his mother taught him to situations that he faced and still face. Aquil lost his mother at an early age, but he credits his grandmothers for their unconditional support and for pushing him towards a successful end. Jibril described his mother as positive, supportive and caring. She supported him through all situations and spoke positivity into his life. These favored experiences enabled the

participants in this study to maintain strong levels of resiliency and persevere through time of opportunity and inopportunity to achieve academic success. It is recommended that African American mothers continue to maintain their prominent position in the lives of their sons, speaking the language of success to promote positive outcomes.

Recommendations for families. Families are the foundation of all cultural groups and societies due to the major role that they play in socializing children to internalize the values of their cultural group or society (Coser et al., 1983). African American families must hold fast to the notion of raising Black males in race-specific ways. Moreover, racial socialization should be designed to encourage Blacks to define self- and group-destructive behavior (e.g., drug abuse, drug dealing, exploitation of other Blacks, and violence) as being anti-Black and in opposition to the interests of the African American community (Asante, 1980). Positive racial socialization, a race-relevant experience, seemingly counteracts the negative impacts racial discrimination experiences impose on the academic success of African American males (Neblett Jr., Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Smalls, 2010). Researchers cite examples of how family members used racial socialization to influence school readiness and academic achievement in their Black males (Hubbard, Lewis, & Johnson, 2014). As previously described, the African American familial system involves a uniquely layered system of parenting. African American families foster asset-based approaches to resilience through co-parenting, extended family networks, relative and sibling support and fictive kinships. The family, as the core, has to begin the conversation surrounding success in those early, formative years of raising Black

males. Progressively, the family is responsible for creating a positive, active presence in the lives of Black males.

The extensive role of immediate and extended family as described by Hill (1972) add value to notions of resilience observed in African-Americans. We understand the African American family to dynamic and complex, encompassing a wide range of interactive members. Wallace and Fisher (2007) contend that the extended family be recognized as a support structure within the African American community, further helping with the survivability and resiliency of the African-American family. Resilience literature recognizes supportive parents and caring extra-familial adults as effective resources that serve to protect young, urban Black males from violence involvement and academic failure (Li et al., 2007; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Some of the participants in this story recall the strong ties their families maintained with the community. Others align their success with the support they received from their parents and family members, alike. Black males should see the family as the first and ultimate support structure for their future success. As a recommendation, remixing resilience for the family begins with sustaining high, but manageable levels of involvement with the home, school and community. It is also important to recognize that family extends beyond blood relatives as shown in the counternarratives in this study. Participants had church members who checked in on them in the community and at school. It is recommended that families continue to adhere to and respect the level of engagement necessary to promote the success of Black males. Salient measures of involvement should be employed. Black males should observe the presence of family members across all areas

of their lives. Moreover, families should participate in actively controlling the language environment present in the home and promoting messages that serve to liberate the minds of Black males as they journey to achieve excellence.

Recommendations for places of worship. Participants in this study strongly embraced spirituality as a success factor. Given the role of spirituality and religion in the Black community, many African American males value spiritual and religious support as a dynamic impacting their success (Hargrove, 2014). In several communities throughout the United States, Black parents are turning to churches and community organizations as one possible source of such support (McPartland & Nettles, 1991). Organizations such as these affirm the identities of Black males by providing them with knowledge and information about African and African American history and culture and by instilling a sense of social responsibility toward their families and communities (Ampim, 1993; Myers, 1988). Drawing from the research on mentoring and student resilience, strategies identified as effective in supporting the academic achievement of African American students, community organizations and churches can attempt to compensate for the failings of schools (Noguera, 2003).

The Black men in this study gave many examples of how spirituality attributed to their success. Jamael was raised by a God-conscious mother who he considered to be a "prayer warrior". The moral support he received from his pastor and the church community impacted his success. Faris fostered healthy relationships with his church members and they were instrumental in holding him accountable for his own progress. Jibril, very involved in church, had a pastor who would visit his school to check on him.

These are clear examples of how the church community intervened on behalf of the success of Black males. Motivating them to be successful through intentional support and guidance served as a beneficial influence for the men.

While it is not logical to believe that these outside agencies are not able to counteract every societal challenge faced by Black males, it certainly has a positive influence on the academic performance of Black males. Given the success of Black males who were influenced by the church community, it is appropriate to conclude that spirituality and active involvement in worship-based organizations are a healthy stimulus to Black male achievement. It is recommended that urban communities replicate successful church-based programs, after-school organizations and mentoring groups that contribute to Black male success.

Recommendations for communities. The school-based community program that the participants were members of (Imani) served as a safe passage zone to academic success. Safe passage zones serve their purpose and can provide benefit, on many levels, for Black males. The participants in this study offered strong, relative examples on how the Imani Community Development Corporation enhanced their schooling experiences. Aquil acknowledged his mentors at Imani for helping him develop the endurance, strength and tenacity necessary to overcome obstacles and achieve academic success. For Faris, Imani's vision was clear and had an authentic mentorship component that he was in tune with. James, joining Imani later in his high school years, immediately recognized its benefit as a strong support system. Khalil states that Imani played an enormous role in both his high school and college success.

The investigative Ecology of Hope Model provides researchers with a strong concept-related framework to address the needs of Black males. The model requires action and the full participation of all stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended that future research adds relative value to safe passage zones by fully exploring and engaging the Ecology of Hope Model. Moreover, the next recommendation and charge is for the alumni of Imani to start community-based programs with initiatives aimed at producing academically successful Black males like themselves.

In this study, the shared language of the community is recognized as an upholding force and strength mechanism for Black males navigating societal (institutional) inopportunity. The collective language of the community serves as the driving force for its members. In essence, words make people. Therefore, the quality of our words makes up the quality of our lives (Sabir, 2017). The language of the community should be conscious and inciteful logic that either directs or motivates actions toward success or productivity. An oppressive language environment stagnates upward mobility and progress within the community. It is further recommended that communities strive to make contributions to a productive language environment as it is conducive to community growth and success.

Recommendations for schools. It has become increasingly necessary for schools to take actions to change the pattern of low achievement of African American males. The fact that some schools and programs manage to do so already is further evidence that there exists a possibility of altering these trends (Edmonds, 1979). A study conducted by Harper (2012) shared the factors that Black males attribute to their success, including the ability

to effectively navigate racially charged campus environments, becoming engaged on campus through leadership opportunities, the development of meaningful relationships with peers and mentors, and receiving ample familial and spiritual support.

The participants in this study spoke about their different levels of academic persistence. They explained how persistence shaped their academic success and help form their identity. A strong sense of community, whether on the high school or college campus, was very important to the young men. This type of connectedness and support positively affected their success. Moreover, mentorships ranked high for all of the young men as a solid indicator of motivation and success.

One recommendation for schools is to increase the number of Black male educators in urban schools in order to provide social, emotional, and career-readiness preparation for Black male students. This layer of support will also allow Black males to have adults to genuinely connect with in the school environment, who truly understand their developmental stages. It is also recommended that school administrators facilitate ongoing professional development sessions focused on culturally proficient instruction. This step will aid in holding educators accountable for culturally relevant educational practices that affect Black male success. Additionally, it is further recommended that schools work with institutions of higher education to ensure appropriate academic and social supports for Black male students' post-secondary success.

Conclusion

The present study sought to answer the overarching question: How can the voices of college educated Black males inform efforts to promote success among Black males

educated in urban environments? An array of insights was gleaned from this inductive research analysis. It would be naive to conclude that the overall strength and self-efficacy of Black males can enable them to avoid all threats present within their social environments. Or, that it is a simple task for Black men to choose to operate outside the cultural climate in which they were raised. Conclusively, the responsibility for Black male success is jointly shared with the family, community and schools. The Ecology of Hope Model was designed and proposed by the researcher, based on the analysis of data and review of literature. Again, this model represents the integral components of the social system where these young men find hope. The Ecology of Hope Model was created around four concepts: (1) contested prolificacy, (2) community proactivity, (3) familial perseverance, and (4) academic persistence. The Ecology of Hope Model summons all stakeholders to become actively involved in and assess the way Black males gain access to, negotiate and benefit from their total physical environment. This is an essential component to address the reorganization of family, communities and schools to influence Black male success.

The voices of the Black males in this study can be succinctly defined as a gateway to Black male academic success. Through targeted action, they efficiently summoned the collective societal forces among them to achieve success. The participants in this study avidly spoke of their environments, family structure, community and schooling experiences. Their collective journeys, regardless to how they are defined by mainstream narratives, were all formulas for success. These young men were intentional about their advancement in society as they effectively negotiated and leveraged the various resources

within their social networks. Throughout the described dynamic changes in their family lives, including other out of class learning experiences (Imani, church, extracurricular activities), they each successfully developed an achievement persona and persisted academically.

Their voices allow researchers to continue to reframe and rewrite the narrative regarding Black male success. The findings suggest that we remix resilience by viewing it as an asset-based process that speaks to the success of Black males. Further, the practice of placing Black males at-promise instead of at-risk through solution-based approaches is vital for Black male success. The present study seeks to impact future studies that focus on Black male scholarship by bringing awareness to the Ecology of Hope Model and how it supports the social balance and equilibrium of Black males.

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